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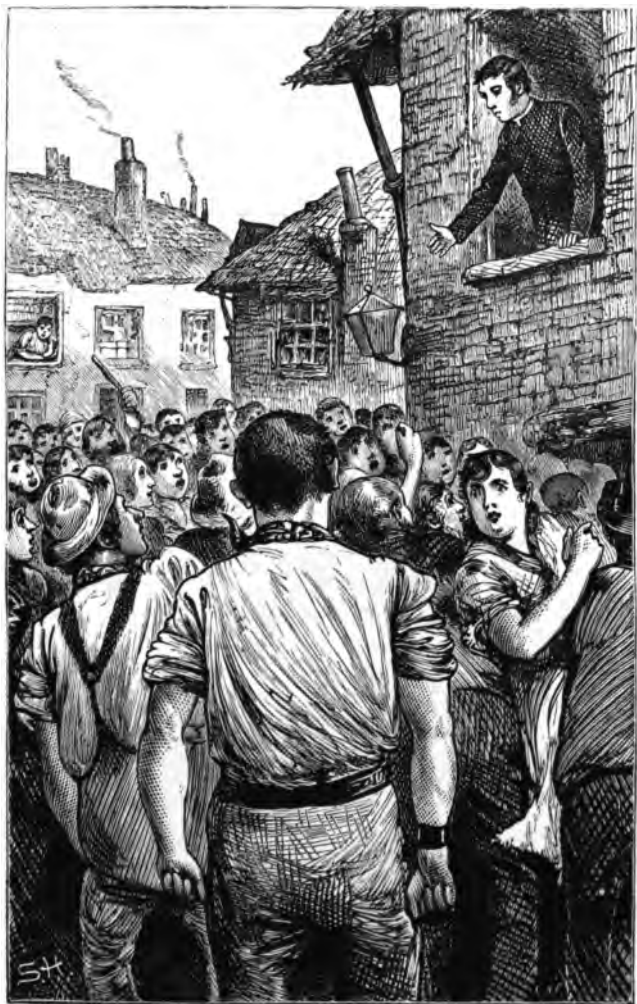
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"Going to the window, he stood there quietly, and lifted his hand in a vain effort to obtain silence."— (Page 159).

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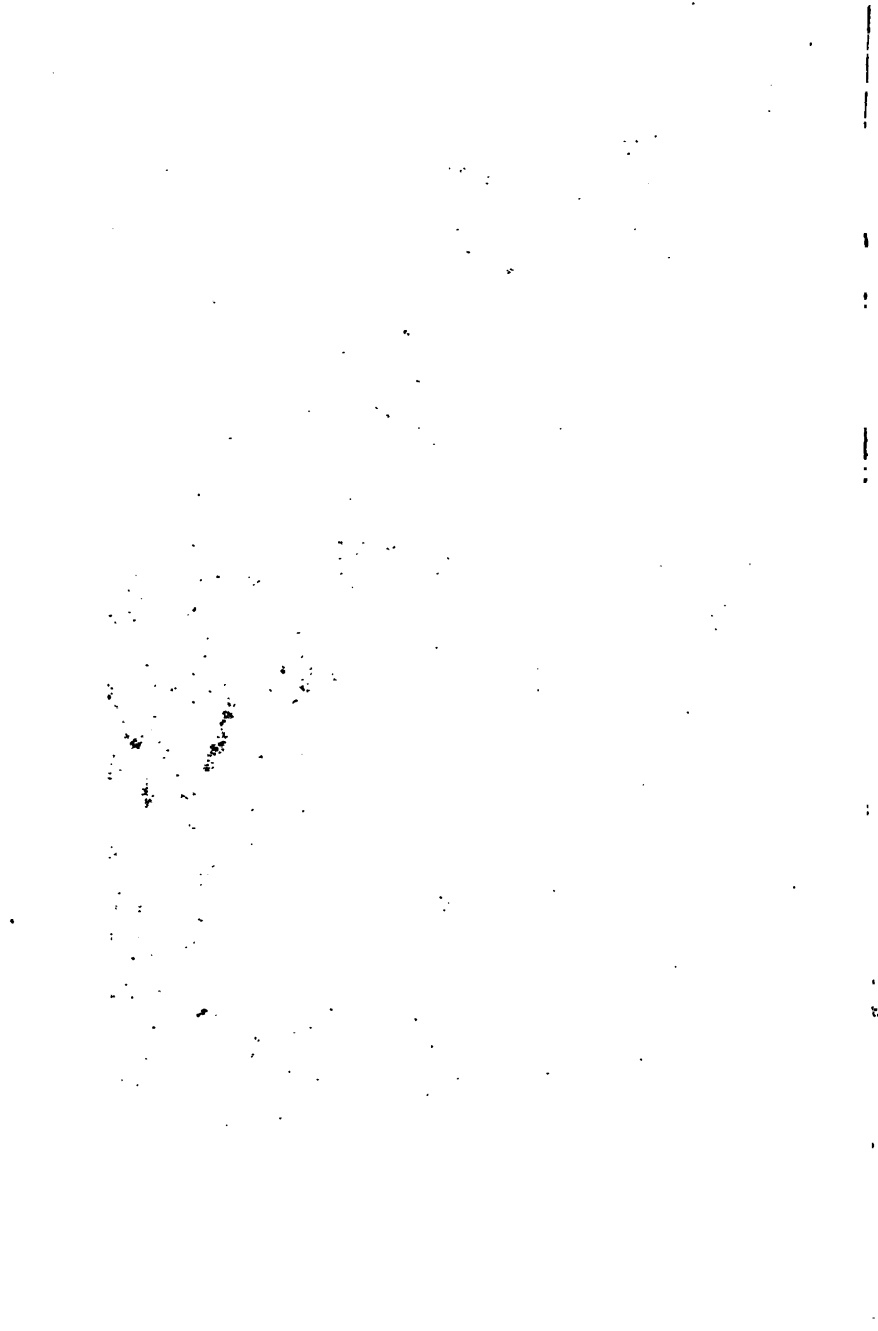
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NEW YORK



IN A CORNER OF THE VINEYARD.

A Village Story.

BY

ISAAC PLEYDELL.

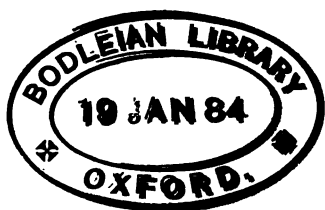
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TO MY MOTHER.



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CHAPTER I.

"WHO WAUNTS CHOORCH?"

THE men from the Salt Works lounged against the fence, and watched the building of the new church.

"If she hed bin a pooblic, now, we could hev stood her," said the thin man with the wooden leg.

"Yew er got it theer, Sandy Maddick," said the young man called Freddy; "yew er got it theer, trew an' squeer."

"Oi am aweer tew hevin' got it, Freddy," said Sandy, in the satisfied tone of one who knew his subject, twisting his wooden leg the while, corkscrew fashion, into a mound of dry earth. "Tew be a-buildin' pooblics," he went on, "is a nat'ral, an', as oi would put it, a plesant thing, seein' as pooblics is nat'ral, an', as oi would put it, plesant pleeces fur chaps as is boi neetur droi."

"Tew be suer," answered the young man

Freddy; "an' sault-wurkurs is moostly al-wees droi."

"Moostly al-wees droi," chimed the salt-workers in unison.

"Tew continner, then, meets," pursued Sandy, "wat oi would put afore yew is this, that if buildins is tew be builded, let 'em be pooblics an' not choorches."

"Who waunts choorch?" asked the young man Freddy, in a tone expressive of contempt.

Apparently there was no one who wanted "choorch," for the question passed unanswered.

Presently Sandy, who had worked his leg so far into the mound that the drawing of it out was a process of difficulty, watched with interest by his mates, took on himself to answer the question for everybody.

"Of coorse," said Sandy, "in the carcumstances which oi hev expleen, thur ant noobody as waunts choorch. It be a thing impossible. 'In fac', tew be a-buildin' choorches, when pooblics is, as oi would put it, skeerce, is a nat'ral weeste o' good brick an' marter."

"Yew hev put your finger on it agin, Sandy," said the young man who answered to the name

of Freddy; and Sandy, encouraged by repeated encomiums, went on,—

“Choorch, if oi should so put it, is a pleece wheer chaps is fetched agin theer will, tew heer wut they doont waunt tew heer, and didn’t oughter heer; and parsons, wich is a koind of foke as gits their livin’ outen choorches, is the nat’ral en’mies of chaps as is boi neetur droi.”

“Al-wees meenin’ wee,” put in the interpreter, Freddy.

“Al-wees meenin’ wee,” echoed the chorus.

“Tew continner,” pursued Sandy; “it do be said that this heer choorch on wich these meesons is a-wurkin’ is, if oi should be al-owed tew put it so, de-soigned fur us sault-wurkurs; an’ this oi am a-thinkin’ is a thing wich we can’t noo-how, and wunt noo-how enduer.”

Chorus: “A thing wich we can’t noo-how, and wunt noo-how enduer.”

“Look here,” broke in the foreman, a big handsome fellow, with thick black beard, and bushy eyebrows, “Sandy theer is roight; this choorch is a-buildin’ fur us; and we doon’t meen tew hev her; leestwees oi don’t meen tew, an’ oi should expec’ noo man as wurks unner me meens

4 *In a Corner of the Vineyard.*

tew. Look at me, meets; oi ant niver set foot insoide noo choorch i' moi loife, an' o'f can drink more beer, an' hit harder, nor eny man here."

This was accepted as proof decisive of the inutility of churches. The aim and end of life being to drink more beer, and hit harder than your neighbour, of what use in the social economy was an institution that not only offered no help but was a positive hindrance to the attainment of those objects?

"Well, meets," said the young man called Freddy, "here be choorch a'moost builded; but wheer be parson?"

"Parson ull come; let 'un aloone fur that, Freddy," answered Sandy, whose wooden leg had by this time bored the mound through and through; "parson ull come afore we waunt un."

"Let un come," said the foreman, "us can tackle un."

Chorus: "Let un come; us can tackle un."

After this fashion did the men from the Lintorn Salt Works discuss the new church and the coming parson. When freed from the works, their favourite occupation was to collect in a group about the building, and deliver denunciatory

criticisms upon it and the builders and all who were concerned in its erection. They lounged against the palings, or walked round and stood under the scaffolding ; took glances at the church from any and every point of view ; and denounced the roof, the walls, the steeple,—in a word, the entire edifice. Meanwhile the church continued to rise stone by stone before them ; and the day came on which the master-mason gave it the final touch, and it stood completed ; a small, neat place, with no pretence to architecture, as modest a house as ever was built for the Gospel.

The church was finished, but where was the parson ?

CHAPTER II.

LINTORN.

THE village of Lintorn was gathered about the base of a hill, a mile or so from the great Lintorn Salt Works. There had been a time when Lintorn was as snug and comely a hamlet as any in England. Drowsy, indeed, you might have called it, had you wished to name it harshly ; but a place which knew nothing of brawls, and where the ugliest sounds came from the pigs that lay in clean straw at the rear of the cottages. The character of Lintorn in those days was wholly agricultural. Of the hundred and odd families composing the community, there was but one that did not send labourers to the fields every week-day in the year ; and that was the general shop-keeper's. By day the street was quiet, save for the mothers who gossiped as they did their washing in the doorway ; the babies who crowed and fought in the gutter ; and the grandfathers who

crooned and droned over the weather, the wars, and the end of the world. Of an evening, in summer-time, the street resounded with rustic music, and the noise of quoits and skittles ; and in winter silence fell on it at dusk, when doors were latched and windows barred, and round the hearth heads young and old wagged over some tale of mystery. On Sunday the women were neat in prints, and the men wonderful in preposterous shiny hats, which, seeing that they were all of one size and shape, might have been exchanged a hundred times, until each man had worn his own and the hat of every other man in the village.

In those days the manufacture of salt at the Works in the valley of the Were, was on a small scale, and the workers, who were comparatively few in number, lived on the spot. Lintorn scarcely knew of the existence of the Works, and forgave the inconvenience of the smoke from the half-dozen chimneys in consideration of the salt which it received free of cost. But the manufacture increased ; the Works were enlarged ; new chimneys arose ; and the numbers of the workmen were doubled, trebled, and quadrupled. The scant accommodation in the vicinity of the Works was

outgrown, and the owners secured land, and built houses in Lintorn. The rough men from the rock-pit and the brine-sheds came and invaded the little village, whose peace thenceforth was gone. Lintorn had never seen such men as these, scarcely had been aware that the earth contained such a singular and uncouth variety of the human kind. Their life seemed to be without law or order. They were always going and coming to and from the Works ; some in the morning, some at noon, some in the evening, and some in the dead of night, whilst agricultural Lintorn slept sonorously betwixt its canvas sheets. From the day that the salt-workers came to it, the village knew no quiet. The night-gang hung about the street during the day, and gambled, sang, swore, and fought like men possessed. Before the cocks crowed or the birds sang, the lanes were noisy with the voices of men going to and coming from the Works, and honest labourers were cheated of their last hour's rest. The small public-house, which heretofore had done but a slender business, began to drive a roaring trade, and the old proprietor, who had pleased the steady and moderate toppers of Lintorn well enough, sold his interest to

one who was better able to cater for the new customers. The old tavern, under a fresh proprietor, became, so far as the salt-workers were concerned, the most popular institution in the village. When they tired of belabouring their wives or their children, when the pastime of dog-fighting palled, and pitch-and-toss, through constant repetition, lost its excitement, the steps of the men turned instinctively in the direction of the "Pooblic." The supplies of strong beer at this establishment increased enormously, for the powers of the salt-workers in the consumption of malt liquor were practically without limit. Never averse from fighting,—though as often as not they fought only for lack of other diversion,—their pugnacity was stimulated by copious drinking, and a day seldom passed without a brawl of some kind. The women were as ready with their fists as the men, and the spectacle of two stalwart wives pummelling one another outside the door of the *Jacob's Well* was more common than edifying. The old inhabitants of Lintorn, bullied and jostled by the new-comers, withdrew more and more from the lower to the upper end of the village, which in course of time came to possess two distinct divisions. Where

the agricultural element abided, the village retained its ancient character for sobriety and sèemliness; but the salt-workers' quarter was a miniature Tophet. It had a bad name far and wide; and country folk jogging that way on sleek pads or in spring-carts, would make a wide detour to avoid it. The police force in Lintorn was doubled; and whereas in the old halcyon days the office of a single constable had been a comfortable sinecure, it had come to pass that two constables had more work than enough to preserve even a show of order.

As regarded Lintorn and its agricultural population, the salt-workers were altogether aliens. They came from the far north, attracted by high wages, and neither understood nor sympathised with the people amongst whom they settled. Indeed, to speak by the card, they did not settle amongst them at all, for they lived to themselves, and by themselves, in a distinct quarter of the village, which had been created especially for them.

The men were, for the most part, strongly built, and well to look at. The women, too, were stoutly proportioned, and not uncomely. But

hard living had wrought many ugly effects upon both sexes; for the men and women vied with one another in drinking and fighting.

High wages gave them a certain sense of independence, and gave them also the means of repairing almost as often as they pleased to the *Jacob's Well*.

They were noisy, dirty, and bibulous; and religion had a pretty bad time amongst them.

The Methodist minister of a neighbouring parish, in a burst of evangelical zeal, went down there once, and attempted services of the revivalistic pattern; but his mission ended as unsatisfactorily as it had begun, its chief results being to afford a novel entertainment to the salt-workers, and to necessitate an outlay on the part of the minister for sticking-plaister and a new hat.

For some time after that the church and its ministers left the salt-workers of Lintorn to themselves; and their two favourite deities, Bacchus and Mars, received an increased amount of attention.

I do not desire to be in any way unjust to them, and can find plenty to say on their behalf.

Their work was severe, and more or less brutalising. They toiled for hours, stripped to the waist, in an atmosphere hot enough to knock over in ten minutes a person of average strength who was not trained to endure it.

It was thirsty work, for they sweated rivers ; and unwholesome work, for the strongest of them sometimes broke down under it.

A good deal of it was dangerous work ; for a man standing on a narrow sloping ledge over a vat of boiling brine, in a shed where the steam rose from the vat thicker than a sea-fog, was liable, if he missed his reach in raking the salt out of the vat, to overbalance himself and topple head-foremost into the seething brine.

It was a work which, in other branches, threw men, women, and children, not over fully clad, into intimate relationship for many hours of the day—a work, therefore, which did not tend in a striking degree to promote morality amongst the workers.

It was a work which necessitated an irregular mode of life, for the workers—the men, at least—were at one time employed by night, and at another by day ; and the night-gang were thrown

upon their own resources from midday until five or six in the evening, with no means of diversion other than those furnished by the bar and skittle-alley of the *Jacob's Well*.

The owners of the Works lived at a distance, and considered their obligations towards their hands at an end when they had built houses for them to shelter in, and had paid their weekly wage on Saturday afternoon.

The foreman, in a general way, was responsible for good behaviour outside as well as inside the works; but he, being like unto the men in all material respects, discharged his responsibility in a somewhat easy fashion.

The fame of the salt-workers' quarter grew from bad to worse, until the chief newspaper of the neighbouring post-town declared openly that the once honourable name of Lintorn had become synonymous with rowdyism, immorality, and the abomination of desolation.

The independent editor spoke his mind freely, and said that something must be done with and for Lintorn. People who read the article shook their heads and frowned, and said that something must be done with and for Lintorn. Letters

appeared in the correspondence column, and irresponsible, well-meaning people made irresponsible, well-meaning suggestions; but no two of them were agreed upon a course of action, and no course of action was taken.

The salt-workers—the two or three of them, that is to say, who were lettered—read the correspondence, chuckled, and ordered more beer. The person who benefited most by the correspondence was the landlord of the *Jacob's Well*.

The rector of Daneby, an old benevolent man, of considerable private wealth, wrote no letters in the newspaper, but drove quietly over to Lintorn one morning, and took stock of the place and its inhabitants.

He walked through and through the salt-workers' quarter, peered into the houses, and dropped a kindly word here and there, in no wise daunted or offended by the invitations of the men to "swill a sup" at the "pooblic," to "pool off 's coot" and engage in private combat with the young man Freddy in the roadway, or to "sing us a psalm, old 'un," on the green.

The rector thought that, in spite of their coarseness, the men and women were a fine-looking

set, and it went to his benevolent heart to see the babes and children rolling in the mud of the gutter uncaring and uncared for. He went home thoughtfully, and as he reached the rectory gate he said to himself, "I'll try it; I'll build a church for them."

Then at last he wrote to the newspaper, and announced his intention.

The proposition was received with an outburst of derision, for the most humane amongst the measures of reform which up to that time had been advocated in its columns, embraced the quadrupling of the police force in Lintorn, and the infliction of severer penalties upon as many of the salt-workers as could be brought within the reach of justice.

The church scheme was ridiculed as worse than Quixotic, and the Methodist minister before mentioned, whose evangelical zeal had undergone a cooling process, rushed into print with an epistle in which he glanced back with shuddering indignation at the episode of the sticking-plaister and broken hat which had been the sole tangible fruit of his well-intentioned mission to the salt-workers.

But the Rector of Daneby had made up his mind, and was not to be shaken in his resolve.

"I intend," he said, "to build a church in Lintorn; to endow it myself, and to provide a clergyman."

And what was more, he set about the business at once.

A vacant piece of ground adjoining the salt-workers' quarter was secured, and the church began to be built. When people saw that the scheme had actually taken shape, and was progressing towards a definite end, they became vastly interested; but they stuck to their first opinion that the attempt to evangelize Lintorn must and would be a vain one.

The feelings of the salt-workers on the subject have been briefly indicated. Their notions on the subject of church-going were primitive, perhaps, but distinct and well defined: Sandy Maddick gave sufficiently accurate expression to them when he said that church was a place where chaps was fetched "agin their will tew hear things wat theey doont waunt tew hear, and didn't oughter hear." The building of a church for their especial benefit was an assumption of spiritual shortcomings on

their part which they resented indignantly ; and the idea of church-going was indissolubly associated with ideas of clean jackets, an unwonted quantity of starched collar, and an uncomfortable attitude of attention for two hours, without the relief of spitting, swearing, or hitting at one's neighbour. Finally, they looked upon parsons as a kind of moral policemen, who were, as Sandy put it, "the nat'ral en'mies o' chaps as is boi neetur droi."

In spite of protests, however, the church was begun and finished.

While it was yet building, the rector of Daneby wrote the following letter :—

" MY DEAR GIRTON,—

"If you be thoroughly recovered in health, and are looking for fresh work, I have a proposition to make to you. I am building and endowing in the village of Lintorn, three miles from this, a small church for a population of salt-workers. They are a terribly rough set, for whom nothing has ever yet been provided in the way of spiritual sustenance ; their name in all this neighbourhood is as bad as it can be, and their attitude towards this scheme of mine is anything but a kindly one. Nevertheless I am hopeful that, if they were

approached in the way in which I feel sure that you would approach them, they might be won over in time; and having inquired into their state, and gone amongst them diligently, I am convinced that they are well worth reclaiming. They have been neglected,—that is the kindest, and I think the most accurate explanation that can be given of their present sad condition. The task of ministering in such a place and amongst such a people is one not lightly to be undertaken. I should have liked it myself years ago; but I am an old man, and no longer fit to stand in the forefront of the battle. You are young, and have spirit and courage, and a zest for the toilsome and practical side of your work. Of the young men I know, I have singled you out the foremost, not because I have a good piece of preferment to offer you,—for in the common sense of the words this is anything but a promising post,—but because I want a man whose heart is in his work, who can lead a forlorn hope with resolute cheerfulness. If you accept the post, you shall be Vicar of Lintorn. That sounds well, but I have told you enough to prevent your forming a false notion as to the position you would occupy. The stipend is poor. I have endowed the living with £120 a year, and having failed up to the present to obtain a favourable answer to propositions which I made to the owners of the Salt Works as well as to some rich persons in the neighbourhood, I can offer you nothing better to commence upon. There is a cottage adjoining the village, occupied by an old

pensioner of mine, which I would gladly place at your disposal, until more suitable accommodation could be provided. Think the matter over with care, and let me know your decision.

"Believe me, my dear Girton, yours always faithfully,

"ABEL GREENE.

"*To the Rev. Mathew Girton,*

"*304, Old Street, London, E.C.*"

To this letter the following reply was received by return of post :—

"MY DEAR MR. GREENE,—

"I have given five hours' thought to your proposition, and am resolved to accept it. I am well again, and after so long a period of forced idleness am thirsting for real work. I shall go, not in a spirit of confidence, but of hope ; prepared to do strong battle in a good cause. Expect me at once.

"Yours very faithfully,

"MATHEW GIRTON."

This was the future Vicar of Lintorn.

Doubtless he had anticipated support from the ripe and friendly counsel of an old friend, in undertaking a work which he knew would tax both faith and energies to the utmost ; but, if so, his anticipations were disappointed, for the

building and endowing of Lintorn Church were the last achievements of good old Abel Greene, who died almost before the new vicar had entered his vicarage.

CHAPTER III.

THE VICAR.

ON a soft and radiant evening in July, the five o'clock parliamentary train from London stopped at the tiny station of Lintorn, and a clergyman got down from a third-class carriage, with a portmanteau of no great size in his hand.

The train crawled out of the station, and the clergyman, the only passenger who had alighted, was left alone on the platform.

By-and-by a porter strolled out of a room on the opposite side of the station, shaded his eyes with his hand, took a quiet, steady look at the clergyman, transferred a tobacco-quid from the left to the right side of his mouth, expectorated, and retired.

Presently he returned, accompanied by the station-master, and both together took a quiet, steady look at the clergyman.

"It mun be paarson," observed the station-master, at length.

"Jes what oi toold ye," answered the porter, and shifted the quid again.

The clergyman crossed the line, with his bag in his hand.

"Mebbe yew've gott'n a ticket," said the station-master, unconcernedly.

The clergyman produced his inch-and-a-quarter of blue pasteboard, and handed it over.

"Wheer be yewr lug-gige?" inquired the porter, the faintest expression of interest illuminating his unintelligent countenance.

The clergyman, with a smile, pointed to the bag which he held in his hand.

"Ben't thur nobbut hur?" said the porter, indicating the bag with a contemptuous movement of his eyelid.

"Nothing but this," replied the clergyman, smiling.

"An' d'yew mean tew put it as yew 've come fur convert yon vil-lige wi' one bag?"

"This is all the luggage I have," repeated the clergyman, still smiling pleasantly.

"Wiouoo!" observed the porter, with a long-drawn sigh, in which there was a world of indignant astonishment; and having said this, he

emitted a copious stream of tobacco juice, and withdrew, followed by the station-master.

The clergyman passed on into the station-yard. In the yard stood John Dorlcote, farmer, stowing packages in his spring-cart.

Hearing footsteps he turned, and addressed the clergyman cheerily.

"Aha! I seed you git down out o' train. I know you; you be the new vicar!"

"Yes, I am the vicar; and my name is Mathew Girton.

"Well, I give you welcome, I do; and I on'y hope the rest on 'em will do the same," said John Dorlcote.

"I hope so, too," answered the vicar; "anyhow, I take it as an omen of good that the first words spoken to me here are kind ones."

"Don't do it, vicar," said the farmer, "for I'm a-feard the omen 'ud prove a lying one."

"I will not think so; but I am told that the task that lies before me is a hard one."

"I should say, vicar," said the farmer, slowly, as he put the last package into its place, and mounted to his seat, "I should say it 'll be the stiffest job you was ever put to."

"Rather rough diamonds, my parishioners, eh?"

"I can't speak to diamonds, vicar, for I don't call to mind as ever I see one; but you hit it straight when you say rough. Vicar, they're a sort of devils."

"Come, come, you mus'n't put me out of heart so soon," said the vicar, good-humouredly. "But indeed, you don't put me out of heart," he went on, "for what you say gives me greater zest for the work."

"I'm glad on it. Keep in that mind, and you may do it. But you'll find it's truth I'm speakin'. I ha' been a churchman all my days, and I ha' brought my daughter Dorothy up a churchman; and no horse o' mine was ever put atwixt the shafts upo' Sunday; and I'm a man as thinks well o' the church. But this I say, vicar, that if you fill yon church o' yourn wi' yon salt-workers, you'll make me think better o' the church than I've ever thought yet. Vicar, I give you good-evenin', and Heaven's luck be wi' you." And John Dorlcote whipped up his pony, and drove out of the yard.

Mathew Girton left the station, and climbed the hill that led to the village and topped the Salt Works. To look at him, you might have thought

that he was not exactly the man for his post. His step was slow, and seemed not free from pain ; his height a little below the medium, and his figure the opposite of robust. In a crowd he would have passed without notice, but had you met him on the road you would have given him a second look. His face was not handsome, but a physiognomist would have found it interesting. The cheeks were sunken and pale ; the mouth gentle, but not wanting in resolution ; the chin strong, and the eyes singularly beautiful, with a something in them which, on a second look, you would have said was courage. Presently he reached the crest of the hill, and looking down to the valley where the Salt Works lay, beheld a curious sight.

The smoke went up from fifty chimneys, and darkened the fields and the sky. By day and by night those chimneys sent out a black and poisonous cloud, for the fires that fed them burned without end. It was a dismal sight, and the more dismal when contrasted with the natural loveliness that lay beyond it. The road by which Mathew Girton gained the top of the hill ran for miles between hedges tall, thick, and flowery, the boun-

daries of big fields where cattle fed, or meadow ripened, or corn whitened unto harvest. Where the road sloped upwards, the towering elms that bordered it mingled their glittering leafage, and made an arch so perfect that the sun at noonday might not cleave it.

A brook, which was little more than a radiant thread of water, shaped a noisy course for itself down one side of the hill, until, at the foot, it broke into a meadow, and rippled away to the river. Going up the hill, Mathew Girton had seen no sight and heard no sound that was not Nature in her simplest and quietest form; and then he stood upon the summit and saw those fifty chimneys whose smoke "goeth up for ever and ever." And, worse sight even than the chimneys and the smoke, he saw the fields around all blackened and blighted. No corn grew there, nor any herbage ripened; but the grass was of thin and stunted growth, and in the hedges were no flowers, and on the branches of the trees no leaves.

"One might almost think," said Mathew to himself, "that here is a piece of the earth which God excluded from the promise He made to

Noah,—‘I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake,’—were it not for the after-thought that if this blackness and desolation be indeed the effect of a curse, it is not God Who has sent it.”

And as he looked, he saw the workmen in crowds below, and remembering the hard things that were told of them, said again to himself, “There is a good work to be done here.”

The young man called Freddy was on his way to the Works, and, looking up, saw Mathew Girton on the hill. An inspiration seized him. “She be Parson,” he said to himself, and was happy in the thought that he would be the first to communicate the news.

Then he came nearer, and took a cool survey of the vicar from head to foot. Next, he unslung the tin can at his back, and drank from it a long draught and a deep. Finding courage in the can he opened his mouth and spoke :

“Oi teek it yew be parson.”

“Quite right,” assented Mathew good-humouredly, “I am the parson.”

“An’ oi further teek it yew be a-coomin’ fur convarf these heer Sault Wurks.”

"Not the Works exactly; but I will try and do something for the help of the workers."

"Thur eent noo man here as waunts convarsion," said the young man Freddy, in a slow decisive way.

"But at least you will come and meet me at church?" said the vicar persuasively.

"Thur eent noo man here as wants choorch."

"But you will let me be your friend; you don't know how much I would like to be a friend to you all;" and the dark eyes shone with kindly light upon the salt-worker.

"Thur eent noo man here as is friendly tew parsons."

"I will *try* and win your friendship, at any rate; you cannot prevent me in that," and a quicker ear than Freddy's might have detected something of pleading behind the resolute cheerfulness of the vicar's voice.

"It hev bin de-tarmined as we can't noo-how an' we wunt noo-how put up wi' choorch; an' loikewise it hev bin de-tarmined as we can tackle parsons," and with these final words, spoken with sullen incisiveness, the young man called Freddy applied himself again to the tin can, and went on his way.

The vicar looked after him a moment, and his lips moved silently : then he turned and continued his walk. It was an evening of exquisite softness, and Mathew, newly borne out of the dust and din of the City, felt all its charms. A warm breeze played around his face, and stirred the dark hair upon his temples. The sun was westering in a clear and liquid sky ; the distant fields beyond the chimneys' range shone green and gold ; the trees were heavy with foliage of richest hue ; the hedge-rows sparkled with homely colours, and birds were singing everywhere.

Mathew turned from the highroad, and skirting the village, took the path which led to his cottage.

Blue-bell Cottage stood on rising ground just outside the village. Before the chimneys were built it must have been a delightful little place, for it stood in the midst of its own small grounds, with fields on every side. I may describe it in a rough and general way by calling it thoroughly old-fashioned in style. The garden was bounded by a low wooden fence, a wooden porch sheltered the door, the roof was gabled, and the windows diamond-paned. The tiles, of a deep red, were fretted with moss, and the porch was tapestried

with vine and ivy, which trailed over the windows on either side the door. But for the smoke, it must have been exceedingly lovely; but it stood, alas! well within the range of the chimneys, and showed the full effects of their baleful breath. The walls were black, the garden almost bare of flowers, and the vine drooped pitifully. The smoke-demon had set his mark everywhere. Nature had done her best, but the fifty chimneys had beaten her.

Mathew pushed open the gate in the fence, and crossed the narrow pebbly path.

An old wizened woman, toothless and hollow-eyed, with an expression half-kindly, half-quizzical, and dressed with a neatness almost forbidding, stood in the porch, dropped the nearest approach to a curtsy which the rigidity of her limbs permitted, and blinked a funereal welcome.

"Oi be Anne Marrow, th' 'ousekeeper, an' God bless ye," vouchsafed this ancient woman.

"I am the vicar, and God bless you," answered Mathew.

"Y' are a small man, 'an puny loike, fur deal wi' they sault-workers," she observed, scanning his face and figure.

"Don't let my size trouble you, Mrs. Marrow, I

am strong, I am strong," was the good-humoured reply.

"Ye look weary," went on the ancient. "Y' had best eat ; an' when y' have eaten, y' had best sleep. Gimme yon bag: the bag's but a puny bag, too ; y' are a puny pair." She led the way into the cottage, and Mathew followed her. Blue-bell cottage was eminently a bachelor's retreat ; for this sufficient reason, that only a bachelor could have found space in it.

To the right of the porch was the dining-room, drawing-room, and study, in one. Divided from this by a three-foot passage, from which arose a miniature staircase, was the kitchen and house-keeper's apartment also in one. The staircase led to a couple of bedrooms, each of them about half as large as a cell in a model prison. This was the extent of the accommodation in Blue-bell cottage, excluding a couple of diminutive outhouses at the back.

Mrs. Marrow placed a wooden high-backed chair at the table in Mathew's sitting-room.

"Set, an' o'll put on," she said.

And while Mathew seated himself, she spread a glistening table-cloth, and placed on it a cup

and saucer and plate of delf, and a new knife and fork. Then she brought in a brown earthenware teapot, and after that, separately, and with much ceremony, a boiled egg, a square loaf of bread, butter in a yellow dish, slices of ham in a blue dish, cheese on-a wooden platter, and watercresses.

"Ye may eat, then ; eat a big deal, but eat slow ; y' are a puny man," and with this in the way of permission and counsel, Mrs. Marrow went out of the room backwards, and shut the door.

Mathew threw open the window, and sweet air and gentle sounds flowed in through the casement. He had lately recovered from a fever, taken while tending a pauper patient in East London. For weeks he lay nearer death than life, watched only by a feeble-bodied woman who owned the house where he rented two rooms, and by a young half-trained good-natured surgeon, whom he had met at many a death-bed in his parish. He had pulled through, thanks mainly to the native vigour of his constitution, and was just then in that state of mind and body in which the best and final medicine is yielded by the pure air, vivid sky, and placid fields of the country in mid-July. Mathew knew well that he had a hard task

before him, but he had undertaken it of his own will; he rejoiced at the thought of it, and was eager to begin.

His religion, after passing through many phases, had come to be of a simple and practical kind. To him the whole world was God's vineyard; and his place in it was just where the ground was ruggedest and the labourers fewest. To be up and doing in his Master's service was meat and drink and happiness to him; he asked only for strength to labour while it was yet day. He took life earnestly, his ears open always to

“The still sad music of humanity,”

which, to him who hears it aright, is the highest and sternest call to work.

At the outset of his career, it was the contemplative rather than the active side of the religious life that had fascinated him. At college he had distinguished himself in divinity; and in his first cure—a remote and sluggish country parish, where there was little scope for work—he had followed up his theological studies with eagerness. Thoroughgoing in all that he undertook, he had read widely and deeply amongst the fathers of the early and

Middle Ages, entering with zest into their curious and captivating controversies on the nature of God and Christ ; the relations of God to man and the world ; free-will, redemption, and all that occupied the brains and hearts of the scholastic and the mystic theologians. He had had his periods of doubt ; had sided now with Arius, and now with Athanasius ; and, proceeding to a later age, had wondered whether after all Pelagius were not sometimes in the right in that great struggle of his with Augustine and orthodoxy.

Then came a time of reaction, when he questioned seriously with himself whether it were the true part of a clergyman of the modern church to spend himself and his energies upon metaphysical subtleties that had baffled and led astray many an earnest and noble man in every age of the Church ; and looking beyond his own narrow sphere, he felt and saw that there was work of a higher and far different kind for a clergyman to do in the living moving world around him.

He cast off the shackles of theology, and came to London, where he got himself appointed curate in a teeming, poverty-smitten parish in the East. Toiling there with all his natural earnestness, his

thought and feeling were revolutionized. He was amongst people who knew not the very name of theology; to whom free-will and necessity, justification and sanctification, grace, works, redemption, and all else that the schoolmen and theorists had fashioned and expounded and wrangled and anathematised about for centuries, were nothing other than "words, words, words," nay, more—the idlest and emptiest of words.

He found that to play his part properly in this new sphere, to do the work which the Church and the best spirit of his high profession summoned him to do, he must throw overboard all that he had learned and prided himself on as deeply, vitally necessitous to a clergyman.

He did so; he merged the theologian in the active sympathetic worker. To people who knew nothing of dogma, or of the virtues of this creed over that; people who toiled by day and by night for bread to eat, and clothes to wear, and a bare shelter against wind and rain, he spoke of a Christ Who also was a toiler and a sufferer, who was an hungered forty days and forty nights, who Himself had no place where He might lay His head, and Who died at length that men might live.

This was his teaching in the courts and slums, in the reeking dens, and foul, overcrowded tenements of East London; and with the name of Christ—Christ the Labourer, Christ the Sufferer, Christ the All-loving, and Christ the Crucified, he won the hearts and faith of His people.

Then he himself was stricken down by one of the hideous fevers that are born amid the noisome and poison-laden airs which men and women and children breathe in the dark places of modern London; and when at length he rose it was like the rising of one snatched from the dead.

Compelled to quit his post, he lay inactive for a while, until he was offered and accepted with gladness the living of Lintorn. He was at this time thirty years old, and unmarried.

As the night drew on, and when he had begun to feel at home in his vicarage, having bestowed on the ledge beneath the window the handful of prized books which were a good part of the furniture of that slighted bag, and settled the question of where he should sit when he wrote and studied, Mathew took a turn round his garden. He watched with the pleasure of strangeness the "solemn shadows" as they sailed over

the sleeping fields ; and caught an echo of falling water, and the cry of a boatman to the lock-keeper. The night-breeze murmured overhead, and rustled through a distant corn-field ; and a nightingale flooding the stillness with her melancholy music sent his thoughts back to just such another evening, years ago, when his heart was swelling with the hopes and fears of a young minister waiting to cross for the first time the sacred threshold of the Church.

His reverie was broken by an echo of strident merriment from the salt-workers' quarter of the village ; the pleasant past was banished by the arduous present. He turned and went in, and taking out a worn and well-marked Bible, sat down to read. Before he finished, every sound without had ceased, and as he shut the book, he sent up a silent petition that there might be put into his hand the sword, not of Gideon, but that brighter and far keener weapon of the Word, against which steel cannot prevail.

So ended the first day of Mathew's new ministry.

CHAPTER IV.

WELCOME!

THE vicar might have been forgiven the feeling of misgiving with which he set out on the following morning to make his first parochial tour.

He started early; the sun was glowing over the fields, and touching with golden light the roofs of old Lintorn.

Feeling pretty sure of a kindly reception in the upper village, Mathew meant to turn his attention first to the lower, or salt-workers' quarter.

The old and the new divisions of Lintorn were wholly distinct and separate. To the old belonged the old inhabitants; they who in bygone days had composed the entire community. It had a homely old-world character; the gardens glimmering with old-fashioned flowers; the cottages neat even to primness; and the people showing in their manner that pleasant mixture

of cordiality and deference which is even still to be found in ancient English hamlets.

"Welcome, sir, welcome to ye; we be glad thou'rt come amongst us: it be a pleasure to have a vicar o' our own;" this was the burden of the greetings given to Mathew, as he took his way through the upper village.

It was well for him that he anticipated a different welcome in the lower village.

It was an ugly, dirty, ill-kept quarter which the salt-workers inhabited. There were three rows of houses, roughly and cheaply built, which the best care on the part of the tenants could hardly have kept in a decent condition, and which, as a matter of fact, had been allowed to go from bad to worse, until there remained scarcely a sound tenement in the whole quarter. They looked their very shabbiest under the white searching rays of an early sun, which cast a pitiless glare upon patched walls, leaking roofs, doors nearly parted from their hinges, and windows stuffed with any handy thing that served as a non-conductor. The streets, mended with furnace-refuse, were black and dusty, the gutters choked with rotting vegetables and offal. Not a flower

was to be seen in any of the windows; not a green leaf relieved the grime and barrenness of the streets. This, nevertheless, was the paradise of the salt-workers, who had their beer, their skittles, and their fights wherewith to beguile the monotony of existence.

The whole quarter was agog with the tidings which the young man Freddy had brought the evening before. At this time of the day the night gang were off duty, and recreating themselves according to the prevalent fashions,—squatting in the doorways, lying prone in the road, pitching for coppers, getting up a fight between two cats and a dog, backing themselves for extraordinary drinks, setting their wives or children by the ears, chaffing, singing, swearing, and spitting.

Old Job Coiting, coming across from the *Jacob's Well*, where he had just taken his early quart, spied Mathew walking down from the upper village.

Job, a man of brief speech, put his head into the nearest doorway and said:—

“Vicur!”

“Coomin’?” was the reply from within.

" Ah ! "

" Cxylgck ! " the simple salt-workers chuckled in their gladness.

The messenger approached the first group in the gutter, and announced his news :—

" Vicur ! "

" Coomin' ? "

" Ah ! "

Sandy Maddick, who happened to be on the night gang that week, and was therefore at home in the morning, stumped into his house and fetched out from behind the door a stout oaken stick, observing laconically, " Moight waunt her: oi've heerd as some o' they parsons needs a deal o' tacklin'."

The news of the vicar's approach spread like wild-fire through all the quarter, and there was a running together from every house and hole and corner.

" What shall 's do wi' un ? " was the general cry.

" Breek 's hat loike we did wi' t'other," said one.

" Rool un i' gutter," suggested another. " Settle un ootroight," cried a third.

Counsel and opinion were divided; but on the general head of giving the vicar a warm reception there was perfect unanimity. .

Mathew, a shade paler than ordinary perhaps, but quiet and collected, a kindly expression on his face, and his Bible under his arm, turned the corner, and came up the street where the crowd was assembled.

Just then there was a cry of "A foight, lads! a foight!" and at the same instant a man ran backwards out of a house at the far end of the street, hotly pursued by a brawny matron, who stood nearly six feet in her boots, and was at that moment using her fists in a thoroughly scientific manner. Reaching the centre of the road the man, from whose forehead trickled a thin stream of blood, stood his ground, and the woman closed with him.

They were surrounded at once, a ring was formed, and the fight proceeded fiercely, the woman scorning the conventional methods of her sex, and dealing blows that told their own tale wherever they took effect.

The parson was forgotten for the moment. Now, Mathew was thoroughly used to fights,

which in the early days of his ministry in East London were affairs of daily occurrence in the lanes and slums which made up his district. He had seen boy fighting with boy, and man with man, and woman with woman; but a man-and-woman fight was a ghastly novelty which disgusted and sickened him.

The ring of salt-workers was compact and solid at all parts of its circumference, and to force a way through it was no easy matter; moreover, as a slender man, of moderate inches, Mathew was scarcely cut out for a struggle with a crowd.

But he made a vigorous effort to force a passage for himself, raising his voice to be heard above the shouts of the spectators.

"Make room—make room—let me come; for shame to stand by and see a man fight with a woman! Let me in, I say, and I will separate them. Help here, help!"

By dint of calling and pushing Mathew forced attention on himself, and as the people in front of him turned about, and created a momentary gap in their ranks, he, pale and trembling, rushed in, and gained the inner circle of the ring.

"What be parson a-doin'? Wheer be yew a-

comin' ? Dew ye waunt fur foight yewrsel' ? " was shouted at him on every side ; but the objects of Mathew's indignant interest were still at it, fist and foot, in the centre of the ring, and he was not to be stopped until he had reached them.

Have you ever noticed, at a fight in a London street, what a quick neat method the policeman has of getting underneath and between the combatants, and forcing them asunder ? It is done not so much by strength as by knack ; and Mathew, who had seen the trick performed a hundred times, thought that he could manage it.

At any rate, without waiting to think, and not four seconds having elapsed since he had broken the outer edge of the ring, he forced his way to the space in front of the crowd, and thrusting himself between the combatants, seized a wrist of each, and with an effort which was for him Herculean, wrenched them apart.

It was quickly and cleverly done, the fight was interrupted ; but the whole excitement and enthusiasm of the crowd were now converted into a white heat of anger against himself. In the very centre of a mad turbulent mob, who pressed on him till he was almost stifled, it appeared for a few

seconds as if Mathew's ministry were about to be brought to an instantaneous and horrible end in this its opening scene. Then those nearest to him, who were themselves made powerless by the pressure from without, kicked and pushed in a backward direction until a breathing space was afforded.

This done, they turned once more on Mathew, who now that he had gained his immediate end, and stopped the fight, offered a quiet, unresisting front to his assailants.

Not a muscle of his face twitched, nor did his body tremble, nor did he seem to be in the least afraid.

A big fellow, without coat or waistcoat, a red handkerchief round his waist and his trousers tucked into a ponderous pair of boots, took Mathew by the shoulders, and shook him roughly, saying : "Think'st thou'st done summut eh, parson? but 'twunt do fur yew tew put yewrsel atwixt us an' our geemes. Us hev had one o' yewr sort afore, an' settled un; and us 'll do seeme boi yew. Mebbe yew'll tauk and tell us what fur yew stopped yon foight."

"It was my duty," answered Mathew.

"An' wheer, if oi moight meek soo boold, dost git thoi dewty?"

"From where we all of us get it,—from Above," replied Mathew.

"Doon't knoo noot about yon," said the salt-worker. "Oi teek it that it be gorspel; but us chaps an't noot tew do wi' gorspel, an' gorspel ur noo gorspel yew hev spoiled foight. What shall's do wi un, meets?"

"Smash un—pool un doon—what fur dost weeste toime tauken wi' un?—doon wi' parson and choorch—doon wi' 'em both."

And with these cries, all uttered with the one purpose of wreaking a mischief on the parson, there came an ugly rush from behind, and Mathew, lifted from his feet, was carried a dozen yards without touching the ground.

The excitement increased, and people at the rear, both men and women, struggled to get at him: one immediately behind him tried to twist his hand in Mathew's collar and throw him to the ground; and Sandy Maddick, whose lameness kept him out of the thick of the crowd, never ceased aiming blows at his head, any one of which, had it taken effect, would have smashed the skull.

Mathew all the while was speaking to those who hemmed him round, asking what wrong he had done them, and why they would not hear him speak. The surging and swaying of the crowd carried him now a few yards forward, and now from this side to the other side of the street, and Mathew, though he showed not the smallest sign of failing courage, was beginning to lose strength, and seemed as though he would sink from bodily exhaustion.

A tall broad-shouldered young fellow, who had only just joined the crowd, forced his way to the front, and placing himself beside Mathew, made as though he would rescue him.

"Leave un to us, Joe Pegler ; he hev stopped foight, an' we're a-goin' to settle un," shouted Sandy.

"Stan' back, or oi'll settle some o' *yew*," answered Joe. . "What, meets, what ; fifty on ye on tew one ! Git back then, will ye, and let un goo."

Taking Mathew by the shoulders he half-led, half-pushed him forwards, every now and then lifting an arm to ward off a blow aimed at his charge, and making him duck his head, and pulling him to the right or left, in his efforts to

keep him as far as possible out of the reach of the mob.

But it was one man against half a hundred ; for Mathew was not only weakened, but had from the first made no effort either to retaliate or to defend himself ; and though Joe Pegler was a match for any one of his mates single-handed, he could hardly be expected to hold out long against fifty of them.

Catching sight of a small fair-haired child who watched the struggle, open-mouthed, from the gutter, he shouted to her,—

“Git ye gone, smart, Bess, and fetch them po-lis.’ Turning again on his mates, he said, “Is their none on ye chaps will come o’ moi soide ?” For all this while, the excitement, and the crush, and the fierce cries, and the mad confused efforts to bring Mathew to the ground continued, and one man only in all the crowd was defending him.

“Thou’rt a good lad then, and vicur’s but a reedy body fur rastlin ; oi’ll gi thee a hand,” shouted another good-sized fellow from the back ; and putting himself on the other side of Mathew, he aided Joe in forcing a way out.

Meanwhile, the police whom the child had run to fetch were close at hand, and coming up with speed. The scene that has taken some pages to describe occupied not twice as many minutes in action, and the police-station—which was nothing other than the cottage occupied by the two constables—was situate at the extreme end of the upper village, not far short of a quarter of a mile from the salt-workers' dwellings.

The disturbance had begun and culminated during the brief time in which the policeman who was on duty had paced his beat from the lower to the upper village. Hearing the noise he summoned his comrade, and both together went at the double to the salt-workers' quarter.

They were both London men, old hands, and well trained to business of this kind. Taking each a side of the mob they closed with the men at once, scattered the outsiders in a moment, and put themselves alongside of Mathew and his protectors. There was warm work for two or three minutes ; but the street was narrow, there were no stones at hand for the rioters, very few of them had sticks, and the neat, effective hitting of the constables, and the clever use they made of

head and shoulders, together with the help given by Joe Pegler and his supporter enabled them to bring Mathew clear away from the crowd, and find a temporary refuge for him. At the end of the street was an empty house, the door of which was broken clean away from its hinges, and Mathew's rescuers ran him into the passage and placed themselves at the entrance.

The salt-workers crowded about the door, clamorous and threatening, and demanded that Mathew should be brought out to them.

The constables with stolid, imperturbable humour stood in the doorway and chaffed them; and Joe and his friend stood by their side, enjoying the discomfiture of the peace-breakers.

One of the blue-coats went in to Mathew, and tried to get him away under his own care through the back of the house; but Mathew refused to go, declaring that he would not budge until he had spoken to the men. He would have gone out to them again, weakened and fatigued as he was, but that the policemen held him back, arguing that to trust himself to them at a moment when they asked nothing better than to have him in their clutches, would be to

invite a further disturbance of the peace, and weakly to yield his own life.

Seeing the logic of this, he went into a room on the upper floor, and throwing open a window which faced the street, addressed himself to the upturned angry faces beneath.

"Why are you treating me in this way?" he asked them, calmly, and with no passion in his voice. "What have I done to you? How have I wronged any of you?"

"Thou'st stopped foight," shouted one in reply.

"Is that a sin?" he answered. "Surely it were a worse sin in me to stand by while a man and woman struggled together. I should have done what I did even had I not worn a clergyman's coat. Have you no worse thing to charge me with than this?"

"Thou'rt a parson," they cried. "We'll have noo parsons. Ant had noo parson yit, and doont mean tew hev none. Coomed one a whoile back an' us brook's hat an' 's noose, an 'll do seeme boi thee."

"But is this just? Is it fair?" answered Mathew, looking down on them with earnest face, and speaking in tones that should have moved

them. "Will you reject me without a hearing? Will you not give me a trial? Let me come and see you in your own homes, and show to you how deeply I want to serve you and to be your friend."

"Thou'lt not set foot i' moi house," said the big fellow who had been the first to threaten Mathew.

"Nur not i' moine," answered another.

"Sheeme on ye—let vicur hev his chance; give un leave fur come an' see us; he's meede o' better sault nor t'other un," cried Joe Pegler from the doorstep; and one or two voices in the crowd echoed him: "Give un a chance, enywee—speaks fair, an' ant noo cowardy man, fur all he's little an' puny."

"Noo parson—doon wi' un; who waunts choorch? Ant we said as we wunt put up wi' un?" This from the young man Freddy; and a shout went up of "Doon, doon wi' un!" in which the voices of the two or three just ones were utterly lost.

Another ominous movement in the crowd caused Mathew's body-guard to assume the defensive again; and the constable who had reasoned with him before, went up once more, and said: "Come, sir, you've had your way, and said you

say; 'twould be better to draw away now, I think; we can't answer for the men much longer, and I'm sure you'll do wiser to leave them for a bit."

Mathew let himself be taken downstairs, but refused positively to leave the house by the back.

"No," he said; then, pointing to the crowd at the door, "I will walk through them. There is not one of them will touch me." And he forced his way to the front, and stood before the men.

Two minutes ago they had seemed ready to tear him in pieces, but as he stood there and faced them, without a quiver of the eye, or a trembling of the lip, there was not one that offered to touch him. Nay, they made a way for him, and he passed through them untouched. He went home, but only to prepare himself for a new effort.

In the evening Mathew received a call from his friend the policeman, who offered him his services as escort when he should visit his parishioners again.

"Thank you; that is a very kind offer, but I don't think I can accept it," replied Mathew; "I really have no fears for myself, and I can't quite reconcile myself to the notion of carrying in the

Gospel by physical force. I shall go amongst the people again to-morrow, and hope for better fortune."

The policeman, who had regarded Mathew's escape on the previous day as little less than miraculous, began to be of opinion that the representatives of the Church carried a charm against riots and rioters which was certainly not possessed by "the force"; but the scepticism bred of a long experience of mobs and their ways was not easily vanquished, and the next day, supported by his comrade, he was on duty very near to the salt-workers' quarter at the time that Mathew had told him he should be there.

At about midday Mathew showed himself in the street where he had fared so roughly the day before. Most of the night gang were there, and, judging by their looks, ready for mischief; but constable number one planted himself at the end of the street, and constable number two strolled quietly down and up again, stopping now and then to exchange greetings or a joke with the men, as if anxious for nothing so much as for genial personal intercourse with them. Beautiful is the style of the well-trained policeman!

Mathew said "Good-day!" to the first group he met, but got no answer other than a scowl; nevertheless no one offered to touch him.

He turned to the nearest house, the door of which was shut, and knocked, but received no answer. He knocked again, but there was no reply.

At the door of her house on the opposite side of the road stood Bet Pegler, with a pipe in her mouth. Bet, the mother of Joe Pegler, in whom Mathew had found his first defender, was the heroine of yesterday's fight; a very able-bodied lady indeed, an insatiable drinker, and, amongst her own sex, the champion pugilist of the village.

Mrs. Pegler took her pipe from her mouth, and saluted Mathew.

"Be yew a-gooi' fur breck in that door, yew parson?"

"No," replied the vicar, "but I am trying to get in."

"Oi dunnoo what fur, seein' as th' house is empty," said Mrs. Pegler.

"Oh, thank you; then I had better try next door, hadn't I?" said Mathew, but Mrs. Pegler continued—

"P'raps yew'd loike tew knoo whoi yon house is empty. She wur a pore wummin as lived thur, and she wur druv awee be-cause she 'adn't noo munney fur peey rint. P'raps yew'd ha' giv' her munney? More loike yew'd ha' took it from hur; yew parsons is good uns at teekin' pore fokes' munney, yew parsons is."

Mrs. Pegler's powers of abuse had passed into a proverb amongst her neighbours; and as it seemed that she might find a new and interesting victim in the parson, the salt-workers on hand lounged up to her door, and encouraged her both by word and pantomime to proceed in the business of baiting him.

Mathew, to whom the notion of having enriched himself at the expense either of "pore fokes" or rick folks must have savoured of a grim humour, let the tongue of Betty wag as it would, and turned to the next house.

But here the way was barred by six-feet-three of bone and muscle, and the big defiant voice which had been the first to deny the petition of Mathew on the previous day, repeated the denial upon the owner's threshold, and confirmed it with a thunderous anathema.

"Will you not let me come in?" said Mathew.

"Niver a foot o' parson cooms in at moi door," answered the giant, with redundances and embellishments which I have suppressed.

"What fault do you find with me?" asked Mathew.

"Oi ha toold thee a'ready, an' these meets here ha toold thee; thou'rt a parson, an' that's more nor enough fur we. Wut call hev parsons tew coom an' thurst thursels on fokes wut doon't waunt 'em? Wut hev sault-wurkurs tew do wi' gorspel? Wut does ree-ligion do fur eny fokes?"

"It prevents us from condemning others unheard," replied Mathew, looking up at his interrogator, who towered a foot above him.

"That's a good word," said one of the onlookers. "Wut canst seey tew't, Bill?"

"He doon't git over me loike that; an' —— me if he cooms i' moi house, —— him!" retorted the big fellow, and Mathew replied:

"By-and-by we shall know one another better, and you will not refuse me then."

He moved to the next house, the door of which stood ajar. Here dwelt Sandy Maddick, who was seated in his kitchen, refreshing himself out of a

gallon jar. The voices of Betty and big Bill had apprised this wooden-legged enemy of churches and parsons of the presence of his vicar; and when Mathew came to the door, Sandy, holding notions of his own on the proper method of receiving parsons, promptly turned his back. Between his pulls at the jar he was wiggling his eldest boy, a lad of about ten, who having heard that the parson was going to open a school, had summoned courage to tell his father that he would like to join it. To the mind of Sandy such a proposition savoured of rebellion, and rebellion, when it showed itself on Sandy's hearth, was a thing to be put down with a high hand.

"John Arthur Maddick, yewer gittin' roi-bellious," said the parent. "Yew'll preet aboot skule, John Arthur, wull yew? D' yew see yon stick on yon wall?" (A more than superfluous question; for the stick was the most prominent ornament on the wall, and when not reposing there, it was generally battering the shoulders of John Arthur, or his brother, or his sister, or his mother). "A stick aboot soo long and aboot soo thick, or it moight hev bin a inch longer an' a troifle thicker—was moost all the skulein yewer feether got; and

here is yewer feether at this dee, a man wut can tackle parsons as fit as the best on 'em. This here roi-belliousness is a thing as is not tew be put up wi'. Boi-an'-boi yew'll waunt tew goo a psalm-singin' along of parson i' that thur noo choorch; an' boi-an'-boi arter that yew'll waunt yewer feether tew goo a psalm-singin', an' yewer muther, an' yewer fam'ly gin'rally. An' in coorse o' toime yew'll be a sort of oidell raskill; an' then bleeme me, if oi doont meek a parson on ye, and parmit ye tew disgreece yewr fam'ly. John Arthur Maddick, youer feether is asheemed on ye."

Having outlined in this vein of cheerful prophecy the probable career of his first-born, Sandy relapsed into silence and beer.

"Not much chance here, I'm afraid," said Mathew to himself, but he took a step forward, and said aloud: "I should like to prevail on you to change your bad opinion of the parsons, my friend. Will you let me talk with you?"

"An' here," said Sandy, neither rising nor moving, and addressing himself chiefly to the stick upon the wall, "an' here be parson. Oi sort of smelt 'un. W'en thur's roi-belliousness about, oi al-wees looks next fur parsons."

"Are we such breeders of rebellion then?" said Mathew, cheerily still, and resolute not to take offence.

"But," pursued Sandy, in the same general strain, "oi hev said as oi can tackle parsons, and oi meeke noo doobt oi can."

"Why, indeed," put in Mathew, who was forced all this while to talk to Sandy's back, "*I* am not a very formidable fellow to tackle. But what need of tackling me? Come, let us talk together as friends. Why turn your back upon me? Will you not even hear me? Why is it that you are all against me? I am come here to be on your side—to be your helper and your friend. Will you not give me a chance to come near you?"

"Gimme moi weey, and we'll be streengers," said Sandy.

"Will you judge me, even before you know me?"

"Oi knoo ye. Yewer all aloike, yew parsons. Wut dost come here fur? Wilt teach us fur meeke sault? Wilt pull coot off, and do a strook honest wurk wi' us? Yew can psalm-sing, an' yew can preech summut in a whoite gownd, an' yew can come aroun' an' proi int' fokes' houses;

but bleeme me if oi knoo wut else y' can do ; onless put roi-belliousness i' heads o' fuleish lads wut oughter git stick-end ; but as fur yewfulness, wull, doont gimme noo parsons fur that."

Sandy was silent again, and no further word could be drawn from him. Filling a pipe, he planted his wooden leg on the chimney-piece high above his head, and fixing his gaze on the stick of education and correction, became stone-deaf and dumb as his chair.

"I dare not talk as you do of men whom I have not known," answered Mathew. "You are against me for no other reason except that I am a clergyman. You say that I am come to pry into your houses, but I know how different my purpose is from that ; and you will know it too, one day. My mission is one of peace ; you shall not quarrel with me, for I will not quarrel with you."

He went out, and into the next house, where lived old Job Coiting. Job was not only a man of brief speech, but he laboured under the disadvantage of seldom finding words to utter when most he wanted them. He had the best mind in the world to overwhelm Mathew with abuse,

but could not deliver himself of so much as an expletive. Pointing to the door he shook his fist, and said "Git!" He would have said, "Get out!" but his tongue as well as his imagination failed him, and he stuck at the first word.

The salt-workers outside, who had followed Mathew from house to house, roared with delight at the spectacle of Job's voiceless indignation; and Mathew was almost nonplussed. But he turned about, and looking from one to another, said,—

"Is there not a man of you on my side? Are you glad that I am opposed and beaten back at every step? What pleasure can it be to you? You see how peaceably I come to you; this, my Bible, is my only weapon. Is it worth while to be so bitter against one who will resist you only with words, and those not his own, but the words of the God who has given him his work amongst you? You do not daunt me, for I know that I must win you in the end. This only I ask, that you will not drive me from your doors, but will let me see, and speak with you, and with your wives, and your little ones, and tell you of that God whom I serve, who has sent me here in the love He bears you, whose will it is that

you should know and love Him too. Now let me go ; and may that God who loves us all be with us all."

They were quiet once more, and two or three voices were again raised for him. He was suffered to finish his round unmolested and unhindered ; and he went through and through the quarter, from house to house ; admitted here, rejected there ; making a friend sometimes, but for the most part either denied a hearing altogether, or listened to with frigid tolerance.

He was returning home, in a state of mind neither exuberant nor despondent, when he heard a voice behind him calling, " Be yew a-gooin awee wi'oot seein' me ? " and turning, saw a bright-looking, ruddy-faced old woman beckoning him from an open casement, with smiles and a fat brown finger.

" Coom in, coom in then," said she, and he entered a neat, well-swept cottage, separated by a strip of garden from the houses he had just visited.

" Sit ye doon," said the old one, with bustling hospitality. " Yew be vicur, and oi be Sewsan,—Sewsan Dunning if ye please ; an' oi be glad t' see

ye. Eh! but they're a bad lot, they sault-wurkers! Oi be none o' them, thank the Lord, thoo oi live nearer to 'em than oi loike. Sit ye down, sit ye down; oi be Sewsan Dunning."

The tone of the ancient was refreshing, and the vicar gladly took a seat in her tidy and well-scoured kitchen. With her own hands she made him some very hot and very weak tea, which he drank gratefully; and all the while the voice of Susan chirruped incessantly.

"Oi be afeared, vicur, ye'll have a deal o' trouble wi' they sault-wurkers; but there's some on us old 'uns means t' stan' boi ye; an' mebbe, the Lord helpin', ye'll bring 'em roun' yit."

Mathew said that if he did not, it would not be for lack of trying, at any rate.

Then Susan gave him her biography, and the biography of her son, who was "a soljer in forrin' cloimes," and the biography of her ancestors as far back as her memory went. She gave him next a full and complete history of her religious opinions; and lastly, would have him read to her in the Bible.

Mathew turned up one of his favourite passages, and read a few verses, when he was interrupted

by Susan, who quickly showed him that her tastes in sacred literature were not in harmony with his. From her soldier son the old woman had imbibed a liking for the marvellous and the terrible ; and she despatched the vicar after David going out to meet Goliath, after Samson in his encounter with the lion, and finally to keep company with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. When he left she gave him her blessing, and bade him visit her again.

Then Mathew went home. As he sat solitary in his cottage that evening, the vicar was fain to acknowledge that so far he had had but small success. But as yet, he had only made a beginning ; and as he thought of the future, he banished faint-heartedness. He would go next to visit the men at their work ; and the following day, at sun-down, he went to the Salt Works. The approach was by a narrow winding lane that lay two inches deep in a fine black dust. The Works were down in a valley, the sides of which were stripped of verdure. Through the centre flowed the river Were, the highway for the traffic that passed between the Salt Works and the coast town ten miles above. Over the river was a draw-

bridge, which was lifted half-a-dozen times in the hour to let the barges pass with their glistening load of salt. The Works touched the river, and from sheds which opened on it masses of salt were tossed into the boats beneath.

Mathew crossed the bridge, and made his way into the great grimy yard, crowded with wooden buildings, in which various processes of the manufacture were conducted. In one place the brine from which the salt was produced by evaporation was being pumped from the springs sixty yards beneath the surface of the ground ; in another the brine was carried through pipes into the big iron vats or pans, where it was boiled over fires of intense heat.

From one of the sheds steam issued in a dense white cloud ; and as the door stood open, and a sound of voices came from the inside, Mathew went in. There he saw a curious sight. In the centre of the shed was a vast circular pan, filled with boiling brine, and over the pan, on a sloping ledge, stood a man, stripped to the waist. In his hand he held what looked like a long wooden rake, which he flung into the middle of the pan and drew to the edge a heap of salt. The face,

neck, chest, and back of the man flowed with perspiration, and every now and then he stooped and drank deep from a can by his side. A thermometer hung immediately above him on which when the steam-cloud lifted for a moment, the vicar saw that the heat was registered at just below a hundred degrees.

But he had heard two men speaking, and he looked for the companion of the first man. A puff of wind dispersed the steam again; and then Mathew saw a second worker on the other side of the pan, who, to his amazement, appeared to be standing with one leg totally immersed in the boiling brine. Mathew, who could not be seen from where he stood, approached a step or two, though to him the atmosphere of the shed was suffocating, and endeavoured to know what this might mean; for the man opposite was certainly working with one leg sunk in the seething liquid. Then the man turned a thin sallow profile in the direction of the door, and Mathew recognised Sandy Maddick, whose wooden leg here gave him an advantage over his fellow-worker.

It was Sandy who was speaking. He said :
"Coomed a-proyin' an' a-spoyn', he did, i' moi

house, ony yisterdee; but oi tackled un tew roights, an' he goood awee wi' teel atwixt his legs."

Then there was a laugh from the first man, and Sandy kicked his leg against the side of the pan and chuckled shrilly.

"They are talking of me," thought Mathew, and at first he was inclined to discover himself; but for a person unused to the atmosphere to attempt moral suasion, or any other kind of suasion, in a brine shed, would have been as ridiculous as to try sermonising in a Turkish bath; so, accepting the situation as altogether against him, he felt his way back to the door.

On the threshold he was confronted by the foreman, who glared down on him and said:

"Who be yew?"

"I am Mathew Girton, the new vicar of Lintorn."

"This here ant noo pleece fur vicurs, then: oi be master i' this yard, and oi doont let noo vicurs coom hinderin' moi men."

"I hinder no one, but others hinder me. All that I would do here, if I were let, would help and not impede your men. If you are master

here you should stand by me, for I have at heart the best welfare of your men, and with you by my side I might do much. The men obey you, and follow you ; will you not persuade them to follow me also ?”

“Thou’lt not git me o’ thoi soide,” answered the foreman ; “an’ look yew here, parson ; th’ pleece fur yew, oi teek it, is in poolpit—leest-wees oi’m meen sartin it beent i’ this yaird ; an’ if yew’ll teek good counsel, yew’ll keep clear on’t i’ futur.’ Them’s moi wurd’s tew yew, an’ moi neem’s Jorge Brodie, an’ oi’m foreman o’ these Saut Wurks.”

At the sound of the foreman’s voice many heads were thrust out at doors, and through the windows of sheds, and other heads appeared suddenly from behind stacks of timber, and over the edges of trucks laden with salt ; and when the people saw that the parson had come to beard them in their very workshops there was a running together from all parts of the yard, and a crowd gathered, of which Mathew and the foreman formed the centre. In an undress, which in some instances was startlingly complete, with faces, arms, and chests stained by smoke and

sweat, with ugly expressions, and turbulent angered speech, the people looked more dangerous here than they had done in their own quarter in the village. "Seem loike follerin' yew, doont theey?" said the foreman to Mathew, indicating his men with a jerk of his head.

"No," answered Mathew, "they do not look like it now; but by-and-by they will, I have no fear."

"Says yew, meets, ull be a-follerin' him boi-an'-boi," said the foreman to the crowd.

"He hev tauked that afore, and can keep on taukin' it; doon't meek noo diffur to us," said one.

"Ah! but let us shoo un as we doont mean fur follur un," cried another.

"Neey, neey; we'll follur un. Poot un oot o' yard, an' us 'll goo arter un then."

Amid a roar of laughter the mob closed, and Mathew was swept along with them in the direction of the drawbridge.

Their anger had changed to merriment at the notion of following the parson in this fashion; but it was a fierce, untamed merriment, and Mathew felt himself cuffed by rude hands, and hustled by rough shoulders; and, as before, there

were some who tried to bear him by force to the ground.

Close beside him was the foreman, whom the resistless rush of the crowd carried with it, and who noted, not without a vague feeling of admiration, the cool demeanour of Mathew in the midst of his enemies. For Mathew's courage and self-possession never left him for a moment, and he continued to speak quietly to as many as his voice could reach.

"Art not afeared on us?" asked the foreman.

"No!" said Mathew. "What have I to fear? If you could feel as strongly as I feel that I have a work to do in this place, you would know that I have no cause to fear. Until my work is done, there can no harm come to me."

"Hast some pluck, parson; bleem me if thou hastn't," broke out the foreman. "Oi'll ha' noot tew do wi' thoi psalm-singin', and noot tew do wi' gorspel; but oi can loike a chap which hev gotten pluck in him. Hoold on, meets," he cried; for they were nearing the edge of the river, and the impetus of the crowd, unless it were checked, must carry them into it.

"Noo! noo! On wi' un tew wauter; a dookin'

'll do un noo hurt," cried voices in the rear, and the van of the crowd were within a few paces of the water.

Brodie turned about, and throwing his huge weight against the men immediately behind him, produced a momentary check. He was aided by others in the front rank, who saw that if the parson went into the water they would have to go in with him. There was a struggle then between those in front and those behind, and it waxed fierce and fiercer; the men in the rear not caring a straw whether a handful of their friends got a dip so long as they could ensure a sousing to the parson.

For two or three minutes the tussle was a sharp one; the rear guard getting the best of it one moment, and driving the van to the very brink of the river, and being themselves overpowered and driven back the next. The yard was filled with shouting, and the thick black dust that coated the ground rose in clouds about the heads of the struggling mob.

Seeing that Mathew was sinking, the foreman seized him round the waist, and gripping him strongly with one arm, swung up the other and

brought it down like a sledge-hammer on the heads and shoulders of those who were fighting against him. They shrank from him to right and left, and darting through the passage that was cleared, he sprang on the bridge, and carrying Mathew under his arm like a feather, bore him in safety to the other side of the river. Then he set him down, and returned to his men, laughing like the bellow of a bull.

Mathew leaned against the bridge to recover breath, and the salt-workers watched him on the other side of the river.

"Can't not tauk that us hev not followed thee noo," they shouted.

"You will follow me in a different way soon," answered Mathew quietly.

"What wouldest seey if us should coom ower bridge an' dook thee arter all?" they cried.

"There can no harm come to those who serve the Living God," he replied; and gathering strength he stood up and spoke to them of Daniel moving unhurt amongst the lions, of Shadrach and his companions walking unsinged in the midst of the fiery furnace, of Jesus passing untouched through those that would have stoned Him, of

Paul set free by the jailer of Philippi, and shaking from his hand the venomous serpent.

They heard him to the end, and no one answered him when he had finished.

"Parson can tauk a goodish piece," said one at length. "All on em can tauk; but can't do noot else," answered another.

"Neey, parson hev gotten some pluck; beent afeared o' wauter," said the foreman; then shouting to Mathew across the river, he said, "Us hev stood quoiety, and heerd thee tauk; can'st git thee home noo; an' best not coom tew Wurks noo more."

"I hope that you will come and hear me in church on Sunday," said Mathew; but no one answered him, and the foreman called the men to work again.

"I have got a hard task before me," said Mathew to himself that evening. "It is too hard; you had best give it up," said a feeble voice somewhere in the region of his boots; but the strong voice of Faith replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" and the feeble voice was silenced.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SUNDAY.

MATHEW'S first Sunday at Lintorn dawned in full midsummer loveliness ; and he was astir at sunrise, and out amidst the dew-laden fields, eager for the work of the day, and anxious for the result. All the week he had been looking forward to Sunday, and wondering what it would bring forth.

There was the church, and there was he, the clergyman ; but would there be a congregation ? This was what troubled him sorely.

His canvassing of the salt-workers had yielded anything but a satisfactory result, and he had doubts whether more than three or four of them would go to his support. Of the others, the agricultural section, he felt sure, for they had put themselves on his side from the first ; but he could not but realise that his mission, primarily at all events, was to the salt-workers ; and they,

almost to a man, had declared themselves against him. In his heart, he would rather have had a promise of support from five of his enemies than from twenty of his friends; but this promise he had not received.

The preparation of his first sermon for his new congregation had cost him a world of thought. As a rule, he preached without manuscript, aided only by a few notes; but this time he had reverted to the practice of his early days in the ministry, and devoted the nights of the whole week to writing his discourse laboriously, from the opening sentence to the close. And when it was done he did not like it, and had burned it on Saturday night; and the early morning of Sunday found him pacing to and fro in the quiet fields, fashioning the thoughts of a brief extempore address.

He was hardly fit for the duties of so trying a day, for the labours of the past week, and the rough handling he had had on two occasions, had weakened his strength; but this he either did not know, or would not acknowledge; and all feeling of weakness he repressed as a suggestion that he had undertaken more than he could ac-

comply, and a temptation to quit his post before the battle had fairly begun.

Amongst other matters, he had been labouring hard during the week to get together a church choir ; but not much more success had attended his efforts in this than in other directions. He had indeed received a promise from about a dozen girls and boys that they would present themselves at the morning service at any rate ; but as not more than half that number had shown up at the practice, and three of them had quarrelled about the lead, he deemed it prudent not to be over-sanguine in the matter of musical assistance.

There were, so far as he had ascertained, no gentle-folk in the parish ; the most substantial people were small farmers, and in these circumstances of course the whole burden of suggesting, creating, organising ; of doing, in a word, everything that needed to be done in giving to the parish proper parochial form and existence, devolved upon himself. Not that he was wholly unsupported, for several farmers had come forward with hearty protestations of friendship, and offers of help ; and chief amongst them that John Dorlcote who gave Mathew his first welcome to Lintorn,

and who had voluntarily taken on himself the office of vicar's churchwarden.

Mathew had paced the fields for two hours, and was returning to his early breakfast, when he saw in the distance the lithe shapely figure of a girl, perhaps about two-and-twenty years of age, approaching the stile which he himself must cross to reach the meadow that bounded his garden. They were on different paths, and as they drew nearer to one another Mathew fell back a little to allow the girl to cross the stile first.

But she, too, at that same instant, slackened her pace; and then, as by an impulse of courtesy, or in a fit of irresolution, they both stood still and looked at one another.

Mathew was the first to move. He went forward a few paces, and the young stranger moved then, and they reached the stile together.

It was about eight o'clock on a Sunday morning in summer, the fields were exquisitely still, though the skies echoed the first fresh notes of the birds. The meeting-place of Mathew and the young girl was a high wooden stile of rustic build, with moss growing about the base of it, a couple of

elms making a tall porch above it, a field of ripening corn on one side, and a new-cut meadow on the other.

Once again Mathew drew back a pace or two, but the other made a little motion, which was a pretty compromise between a curtsy and a bow, and seemed as though she would speak.

Mathew was quick at noting faces and figures, and saw that the girl was of a fair height and a shapely form, rather slender than rounded, with a smooth white brow, nut-brown eyes and hair, a well-cut mouth, firm, yet tender and sympathetic, and one dimple that came and went in her chin. She had beauty, but it was of a quiet order; and an intense, almost shrinking modesty characterised her whole bearing.

She seemed, I said, as though she would speak to Mathew; but the words that should have come to her lips appeared to have forsaken them, and she only looked up at him, half-timidly, half-smilingly.

Now Mathew on his part was but a poor hand at opening a conversation in circumstances of this kind; indeed, it had not often been his lot to encounter maidens of one- or two-and-twenty, with

brown eyes and a dimple, in summer fields at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning.

To a salt-worker, a labourer, or a grandmother of four-score, he would have given good-morrow on the instant, and been ready enough then and there to open a conversation on any appropriate subject; but here he was facing this demure young woman at the foot of the tall stile, positively cudgelling his brain for a suitable observation. And after some moments' cogitation, he could think of nothing more apposite or ingenious than this:

"You are early abroad this lovely morning."

"I am always out early," was the reply, in a clear sweet voice; "but I came up here this morning to—to see you. My name is Dorlcote; it is my father who is to be your churchwarden, and last night he said that you had had great difficulty in getting together a choir, and that as churchwarden's daughter he thought it my place to, to—and I should like to."

"To join the choir? You could not have made a kindlier, or a more welcome offer," answered Mathew with warmth. "The thought of the choir has caused me much trouble, but now my mind will be at ease."

“Oh, but please do not expect too much from me! I am a poor singer at any time; and I am afraid I shall be nervous singing for the first time in a church choir,” answered Miss Brown-eyes; but Mathew said, reassuringly:—

“I think you need have no fears on that score. You will find, if you are earnest in the work,—and I am sure that you are earnest,—that the service in its own force and beauty will carry you along with it; you will not think that any one is watching you, or listening to your voice; you will think only that you are singing the Litany and the Psalms and the hymns. No one can be nervous in singing those.”

“Yes, I have felt that in singing the service many times; but I was afraid that nerve might perhaps fail me when I knew that I was to be in some part responsible for the singing of a whole congregation. But I shall go now with less fear. And I will be in my place punctually, and—and good-bye. I mean good-morning.” And with another little dainty movement, which though neither a bow nor a curtsy, was a quaint and pleasing compound of both, the brown eyes and the dimple turned hurriedly and shyly away, and

vanished along the path by which they had come.

Mathew stood for a moment to watch the little girlish figure with its free graceful movements, then crossed the stile and went home to breakfast, feeling somehow as if a large portion of his responsibilities had been lifted from him.

About a couple of hours later he started out again, and took his way to the church. The village was on the alert, and Mathew received many curious glances as he went along. It comforted him to note that the agriculturals were turning out in considerable numbers and moving in the same direction with himself; but there was very little to hope from the attitude of the salt-workers, who stood in groups about the road expressing contempt after their own fashion.

Some of them jeered loudly, and, but for the presence of the two policemen, would probably have taken other methods to show their disapproval of church-going and church-goers. However, they contented themselves with obstructing the pathway, and compelling those who did not wish to come into collision with them to take the road. When the vicar came, he was received

with mock reverence, some of them taking off their caps, others bowing elaborately, and two or three asking with downcast faces and much earnestness whether they could be "put i' the roight wee tēw salveeshun." To these, and all other loungers along the road, Mathew gave a kindly "good-day," and begged of them that they would go with him to church, that they would go were it only for half an hour, for ten minutes; that they would but so much as cross the threshold, or stand in the porch without.

There seemed a touch of pathos in the note of the little bell as it swung to and fro in the belfry, calling to those whose ears were closed to its voice. The exterior of the church had a curious and not unpicturesque appearance, being formed entirely of clinkers, the hard cinder left by coal burned in the furnaces, of a dark colour mostly, but tinged here and there with a yellowish or a ruddy hue. The shape of the building was simple in the extreme; there was a wooden porch, over which as yet no ivy had begun to climb; the interior was fitted with low open seats, uniform in every part of the building; and the dark tessellated flooring harmonised with the colour of the

walls. About one-third of the benches were occupied when Mathew entered and passed up the aisle to the vestry; two or three women and young Joe Pegler represented the salt-workers' quarter, the rest belonged to the upper village and the out-lying farms. On the front bench was John Dorlcote, sitting bolt upright, his daughter Dorothy, true to her promise, faced her father in the choir-stalls, which, to Mathew's grief, were three parts empty.

As Mathew passed him, the farmer made a solemn motion with his head, which Mathew was at liberty to construe either as an expression of welcome, or a sign of grief at the paucity of the congregation. In the vestry Mathew was confronted by the long-drawn face of his bell-ringer.

"Mornin' tew yew, vicur," said that functionary in a despondent tone. "Things be a-gooiin' contrary, an' noo misteek. The wickid be a-prosperin', an' a-liftn up thur voice an' hollerin, an' bleeme me if oi knoo wut be a-comin' tew the people o' the Lord. That thur boi wut yew engeeged t' bloo bellus fur orgin, he beent here, that boi beent: he be a-pleein geemes at marbils, an' other divilsomeness, an' sez, sez he, belluses can bloo

thersels. W'ich belluses can't; but it doont marter tew boi. An' yon quoire wut should be in thur pleece fur lift up thur voice an' sing, yon quoire beent on'y foor on 'em come, an' sez, sez quoire, bleeme 'em if theey doon't feel sort o' 'bashed fur stan' up an' sing 'long of thersels."

Two more drops in Mathew's cup; the organ-boy had "struck," and the choir had reduced their numbers to four, of whom two were basses, one a treble, and the other of no particular voice at all, who had been taken on his own assurance that he was "a reer 'un at gooin' w'en he'd got start."

Putting on his surplice, Mathew glanced towards the harmonium, and saw to his dismay that the man who had offered his services to play was not there.

"Where is he?" asked Mathew, turning in despair to the bell-ringer, who united with that office the duties of verger, sexton, vestry-attendant, and church-keeper.

"Seed un aboots quarter-hour agoo, wi' 's 'ead unner poomp, an' yon bellus boi a-poompin' on un loike showers o' reen," answered the bell-ringer. "Sez tew un, sez oi, 'Be yew a-coomin'

fur plee orgin?' an' sez to me, sez he, 'W'ich orgin's that?'"

At his wit's end, Mathew sent for his churchwarden, explained the situation, and asked whether he knew of a musician amongst the congregation.

John Dorlcote ruminated, and replied: "Can do a piece on the trombun mysel', but ant gotten her wi' me; and trombun don't run well i' single harness, neither is there talk of her i' Scripture, though tunefuller nor flutes. There's my gal, there's Dorothy; ant gotten just her father's ear for tunes mebbe, but had a sight o' finishin' on the pianner, an' can play most anything, on'y give her time, and don't stan' at her back."

Dorothy was sent for, and at Mathew's urgent appeal undertook to occupy the place of the defaulting organist.

The service commenced amidst somewhat depressing conditions, and do what he could Mathew was unable to dispel the cloud that seemed to have settled on the congregation. Everything went badly; the choir would not follow the lead of Dorothy; they hung back until after she had begun to play, and continued singing after she had ceased. They sang where they ought to have

prayed, and prayed audibly where they ought to have sung. Towards the middle of the service, owing to the conviction of the choir that they knew a good deal more than the leader at the harmonium, the music broke down hopelessly, and the responses were nowhere. The younger members of the congregation tittered, and the older ones looked sorrowful and glum.

Matters were made more trying by the conduct of the salt-workers outside. When the service had started, they commenced an opposition service of their own, with mock Psalms and a burlesque sermon, which were audible within the church. Occasionally a face would appear at the window, grin, and disappear; and towards the middle of the service a wooden leg was heard stumping up the path, and Sandy thrust his head in at the door, and took in the scene with an expression of infinite disgust. Then he stumped away, and presently returned, bringing with him Job Coiting and the young man Freddy, who put their heads into the church, and their tongues out of their mouths, and made a guttural sound, which was doubtless intended to signify victory on their side. Mathew hoped that they would stay for the

sermon, and was encouraged in the hope when the body of Job Coiting followed his head into the church, and he placed himself edgewise on the corner of a seat. But the grimaces of his friends at the door overcame his gravity, and he withdrew.

Entering on his sermon, Mathew went straight to the subject of his position as vicar of Lintorn. He told his congregation, not in a repining or a bitter spirit, but simply, straightforwardly, all that he had gone through in the previous week ; confessed that he had to encounter opposition in his new ministry deeper and more determined than he had met with ever before, and went on to express his hope that in a little while this would be changed, that the church would become, what he desired that it should be, a centre of good works and kindly feeling in the parish. He was there, he said, to spend himself and to be spent in their service ; he had come amongst them with feelings of love, and with a sincere desire to be the friend, helper, and counsellor of every man and woman of his people. He did not mean to force himself upon them, but no unkindness, no persecution, would make him shrink in the face of duty, and he asked only justice at their hands.

The service came to an end, and Mathew, not without congratulations, and renewed expressions of sympathy on the part of those who were present, went home to his bachelor dinner, feeling that, at any rate, he had done his best.

The Sunday School in the afternoon was not, any more than the service in the morning had been, brilliantly successful; for the handful of scholars who presented themselves were mainly concerned to know when and how soon parson intended to give them a treat for attending school, and whether swings would be provided, as at the fair, and what quantity of buns each scholar would be allowed to eat. They further intimated with much candour that a main reason why they had come to school was because they had been sent, and that they had been sent because their parents wanted them out of the way. Mathew Girton, however, did not care much how or why they came so long as they did come; and having gathered them about him, he told them in simple language two or three simple Bible stories, and sent them away better pleased with their entertainment than they had expected to be.

The favourite occupation of the salt-workers on

Sunday afternoon was drinking beer. When the public-house was opened, the children were sent with jugs, cans, or any capacious utensil, to procure liquor for the bout; and the parents sat together and drank so long as there was anything to drink. The afternoon of the Sunday on which the new vicar preached his first sermon was somewhat of a special occasion, for it was universally allowed in the lower portion of the village that the service had been a failure; and the men took pride in the notion that they had brought about this very satisfactory result. There was in consequence a sort of general carousal, the men clubbing to furnish an extra quantity of liquor; and when they had well drunken they went out and looked at the church, much in the spirit in which soldiers might have contemplated a fort they had demolished. The church walls, to be sure, were standing, "but," as Sandy said, "wut be good o' choorch if them as choorch wur builded fur wunt put up wi' choorch?"

The noise of the men over their pewters reached Mathew as he sat in his cottage on the hill, and it did not gladden him.

CHAPTER VI.

DOROTHY.

A WEEK went by, and Mathew had got no nearer to the affections of his parishioners, and the congregation was no larger on the second Sunday than it had been on the first. After putting off his gown in the vestry, Mathew came back to fetch his book from the pulpit, and saw John Dorlcote talking with Dorothy his daughter at the door of the church. Then John went out, and Dorothy, after hesitating a moment, came up to where Mathew stood by the pulpit. Mathew had not seen or spoken to Dorothy since the Sunday before, when he had met her in the fields before breakfast, and in the vestry at the time of service ; but already a kind of sympathy had sprung up between them.

Mathew was conscious of having addressed his sermons in an especial manner to John Dorlcote's daughter, because he had noted that she followed

him more attentively than anybody else, and he always preached at his best listener.

But now, as they stood together by the reading desk, the hesitancy on Mathew's part and the shyness on Dorothy's, which had been present at their first meeting, were here again; and Dorothy bent her eyes and counted the red and black diamonds in the floor, and Mathew played a tuneless tune with his fingers on the reading-desk, and coughed, although he had no cold.

At length Dorothy lifted her head and spoke:

"Mr. Girton, my father says that you have no one to help you in the Sunday School. I have never tried to teach, but I am very fond of children; and some of the children in the village know me. If it would be any help, my father would like me to take a class, and—and I should like it myself."

"Thank you, sincerely. You and your father are very kind to me, and I should greatly value your help in the school," said Mathew, and put out his hand.

"Then I will come, if you please," said Dorothy.

"Will you come this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"You are my first volunteer, and I am afraid that, for the present, at any rate, you will find it rather an irksome task. The ground has to be broken as yet, and it is rather rugged ground," said Mathew apologetically.

"Oh, I do not think I shall mind that," replied Dorothy; "and if I could get the children whom I know to come to school, I should feel at home with them; and perhaps more would come afterwards."

"Come, you speak cheerily," said Mathew. "You are the helper I want. I see you in the midst of a big class already."

"Indeed, I have not any confidence in myself," she replied; "and I don't think I should have had the courage to ask if my father had not prompted me, and I had not known how hardly you are placed."

"I cannot thank you enough," answered Mathew, his face aglow with gratitude. "Yes, indeed, I stand alone here just now; and if it were not for a kind of obstinacy that drives me on in the face of difficulties, I should be far sunk in the Slough of Despond already. But I am sanguine, too, and a very little encouragement goes a great

way with me. I have much more confidence at this moment than I had ten minutes ago. And have no fears for yourself. If you are fond of children, and children are fond of you, you will find that the gift of teaching them has not been denied you."

So Mathew enlisted his first teacher for the Sunday School, and that afternoon's work was the brightest he had yet done. The numbers of the scholars showed a slight increase; for the first batch had told their friends that the "vicur spooke greet foine stoories oot o' Boible," and (though on this head they must have romanced) that there was to be a school treat on quite an extraordinary scale, at which the child was to have a prize who eat the most buns. It was pleasant to watch the ways of Dorothy with the children; how timidly, but how winningly, she drew them out, and made them ask questions, and how cleverly she managed to keep them interested and quiet. Mathew felt that he had secured a good lieutenant in Dorothy; and when school was over he rallied her with gentle humour on the doubts she had expressed as to her capacity to teach.

"Oh! but *did* I manage well?" she asked

eagerly. "I thought I was making a terrible failure."

"I did not think so, and I'm sure the children didn't. Did you not see how quiet and how pleased they were? I was taking lessons from you all the time."

"Ah! no, indeed; but it is very kind of you to encourage me. And am I to come next Sunday?"

"Please, or I think the school will collapse. I expect that by Sunday next you will find your class has grown wonderfully. Good-bye; and once more, thank you."

It chanced that the next evening Mathew took a walk through the fields, and went beyond the range of the chimneys, and came upon a region he had not explored before. Below him, the gentle Wre flowed through fields untouched by smoke, and the fresh and vivid colours of grass and hedge and tree were a welcome relief from the universal blackness that surrounded Bluebell Cottage. At a little distance the river was spanned by the "Heron's Bridge," so named because, as tradition said, a solitary heron had once made her nest in the close reeds beneath it; and high above the

bridge was a miniature wood of pine and birch and elm, which sloped sharply to the river. Its sides were sprinkled with wild and homely flowers, each in itself a bright particular spot of colour. A bluish smoke rose amongst the trees, and the smoke came from a quaintly-twisted chimney, and the chimney belonged to a quaintly-fashioned homestead. A white and yellow field of "bearded barley" made a background for the trees; and the reapers, with bended backs, reaped steadily under the evening sun.

As Mathew stood upon the Heron's Bridge, he heard a sound of children's voices from the house amongst the trees, and the blue smoke guided him upwards. Presently he stood outside a rustic gate, and in an orchard beyond he saw a number of small children gathered around a girl, who was talking to them. The children were bidding the girl good-bye, and in a minute they came trooping out of the orchard, and Mathew recognised in them the little ones who had formed Dorothy's class at the Sunday School. Dorothy followed them to the gate, and recognised the vicar. Her brown eyes lighted, and the dimple came and went in her chin, and she seemed

both pleased and abashed at sight of the clerical figure on the other side of the gate.

"We have not seen you here before, Mr. Girton," she said with a smile of welcome.

"No," said Mathew; "this is the first time I have made my way to this beautiful spot. You live here?"

"Yes; father made this place for himself. We are just out of reach of your terrible chimneys; that is why we seem so beautiful to you. But please come in; father will be home immediately, and he would like to see you."

Mathew needed no second bidding, and passed through the gate which Dorothy held open for him, and crossed the mossy path that led into the garden.

The voices of the children sounded across the river, and Mathew said, "You seem to have been keeping school again?"

"Oh no!" said Dorothy; "those are the children of some of your salt-workers, and they come to me two or three days a week while their mothers are at work. I call that my nursery," she said, laughing, pointing to the orchard; "we have games and read, and tell stories there for

two or three hours, whenever the children come to me. Their mothers like it, and the children like it, and I like it ; so it pleases all of us."

"Excellent!" said Mathew ; "I had been wondering how the mothers who go out to work provided for their children."

"I think it very good of them to trust their children to me," said Dorothy ; "and we have grown so fond of one another, that I don't know what I should do without them."

Talking, she led the way to the house, and Mathew found himself in a great square kitchen, glistening with cleanliness, and filled with the scent of honeysuckle and roses.

"Is this your library?" asked Mathew, pointing to a narrow bookshelf, which accommodated some dozen or fifteen volumes.

"Oh, I have read all those," said Dorothy, sighing ; "and some of them two or three times over."

Mathew scanned the titles. They were old-fashioned books of theology and devotion, with two or three "Church" novels, some travels, and three or four biographies.

"You have some good books here," he said ;

"some of these will well repay a third and a fourth reading."

"I think I know the best of them by heart," said Dorothy, "for it is three years since I have seen a new volume."

Books were a subject Mathew was always ready to discuss, and when he found that Dorothy had extracted the pith and marrow of her little library, he said, "I have some on my shelves that you would like to read; if you will allow me, I will lend them to you."

Dorothy's eyes sparkled assent.

"You have time, then, for reading?" went on Mathew.

"Oh yes! I make time," said Dorothy. "If I did not read, what should I do here amongst the trees all day?"

"But you work; and you have your children."

"Yes, but the children only come in the summer, and when the work is done—what then?"

And as they talked together, and Dorothy lost her shyness, Mathew learned that she longed to do some useful work, and his interest in her increased a hundredfold.

"I have so little opportunity," she said, and her grey eyes filled with sadness.

"But," said Mathew, "you are not wasting your time. Your sphere is a small one, perhaps; but in this big world the strongest of us can be useful only within a very narrow area. Let us be thankful that we are allowed to do even a little."

"But mine is so *very* little," pleaded Dorothy.

"I do not allow that," answered Mathew; "nor would those mothers allow it, whose place you fill for their little ones while they are toiling, nor would the children themselves allow it. And your father, whose home you have filled with cleanliness and brightness, would he allow it? Come; your opportunities are not so very small, and I do not think you have neglected them. It is a commonplace, but it is also a deep truth, that the most useful work we can do is that which lies the nearest to our hand. This is the work you are doing now; and, believe me, you ought not to despise it."

"Oh, do not think that I am discontented! I am very happy here,—indeed, I often think that I am too happy; and then my very happiness makes me unhappy, when I think of all that needs

to be done, and that ought to be done outside for the people whose lives are sad and toilsome. The work of the missionary, now,—that is a grand work, and your work here, that is grand too.”

“To labour directly for God is, of course, man’s highest calling on earth,” answered Mathew. “But you, who are so anxious for results,” he added smiling, “how would you be satisfied with such results as I am obtaining here?”

“Now you are giving me a chance to lecture you,” said Dorothy, smiling back at him. “You must not seek results yet; it is to look for harvest before the blade has sprung.”

“Yes, yes, I know it; I am too impatient. But it hurts me that these men should treat me as their enemy, only because I would be their friend. They will not let me so much as approach them.”

“Have you seen them at their work?” asked Dorothy.

“Yes, certainly; I went to the works immediately;” and he described his experiences on the occasion of his first visit.

“They treated you shamefully,” said Dorothy, with warmth; “but it is as the foreman says; he is practically the master there. The owners leave

the men almost entirely in his hands, and they say Brodie is as strong in will as in body ; and all the men are afraid of him, and obey him implicitly. Still you went there, and saw the men at their tasks, and did not what you saw explain to some extent the difficulties you are meeting with in your work ? ”

“ I think I see your meaning,” replied the vicar. “ You would say that the work itself helps to brutalize the men ? ”

“ Oh yes ; it must, I am sure. Father took me over the works once, and it saddened me so much to see those men toiling almost like beasts, and under such terrible conditions. I could not wonder that men were drunken who live their whole lives almost in an atmosphere which sickened me in five minutes.”

“ You are right,” said Mathew ; “ there is much to be said for them. If we put men to work that is degrading, we should not wonder that they are themselves degraded.”

“ The women, too,” said Dorothy, “ work there as no women ought to work ; and can we wonder that they are made unwomanly ? ”

“ You are right again,” replied Mathew. “ I

have thought of this, and I am glad to be confirmed by you. But if this adds to my difficulties, I cannot help thinking that it adds also to my responsibilities. Something must be done for these people ; how is it to be done ? ”

“ Courage,” said Dorothy, softly ; “ courage and patience.”

“ Courage I have,” said Mathew, “ patience I need.”

“ You will succeed,” said Dorothy, her face lighting with enthusiasm. “ I am sure that you will succeed. You have been sent here to do this work, and I am confident that you will do it.”

“ See there, what words may do,” cried Mathew. “ You give me the sense of success already.”

“ You did the same for me at school yesterday ; it is a fair exchange. What keeps father, I wonder ? He is generally punctual, because when he comes late I scold him, and he doesn’t like to be scolded.”

Here Mathew might have felt that there was an opening for something pretty on his part, but pretty things did not come glibly to his tongue ; so he fell back instead on a reference to the books he was to lend her, and then bade Dorothy good-bye, and left.

Mathew Girton was as little given to grumbling

as any man living, and no man concerned himself less about his material surroundings. But it just glanced into his mind as he stood in Bluebell Cottage on his return that it was a different place from the house he had quitted. A well-swept hearth and a shining floor had attractions for his eye; and the scent of honey-suckle and roses blown through an open window was, he admitted, pleasant enough. Mrs. Marrow's range as a housewife was limited; she scoured the hearth on Saturdays, and the floor on Mondays, and neither the floor nor the hearth showed themselves particularly grateful for her pains. As for honey-suckle and roses, the smoke-demon had settled accounts long ago with all such sweet-smelling things as once throve in the garden. The fittings of his dimity cottage were beyond doubt useful,—for they were so few that he could not have dispensed with one of them,—but they were distinctly not ornamental; and a notion tried to assert itself in Mathew's mind that there were certain material adjuncts which might not be altogether unacceptable in the cottage even of an obscure country parson. But the notion, so far from resting, had barely gained a footing before it was routed with

ignominy ; and then Mathew, asking himself, with genuine anger, what foolishness it was that had come to him, picked out with care two or three books from his shelves, tied them together, and laid them in the window.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE SKY.

IT was an uphill fight that Mathew Girton fought in his parish. His enemies were strong, and they stood firmly together, overawing the few who, if left to themselves, would have received his offers of friendship. The opposition he encountered after the first week or two was, for the most part, of a sullen, silent kind—the hardest always to be overcome. The men shunned him as if he were the plague. If he passed two or three of them together upon the road or in the street, he had oftentimes a coarse word or a jeer; but when he met one of them alone, the man would turn away his face rather than look at him and answer his salutation. Mathew had known parochial difficulties before he went to Lintorn, but never such fixed and abiding determination on the part of men to oppose at every step his efforts to conciliate.

"Is there a curse upon my work?" he asked himself one day, in a burst of disappointment; and almost it seemed as though there were. And from day to day he tortured himself with self-accusations,—saying that the fault must be in himself; that he lacked earnestness, or courage, or sympathy; and that for some such reason the result he so longed to see was being withheld. Then he went to work harder than ever; and at night, when he returned home, he was ready to despair, because the cloud that hung upon his path seemed always to grow darker instead of lighter.

But the farther he seemed from success, the more strenuously did he endeavour to win it; and one day he said to himself, "The people will not come to me in church, I wonder whether they would listen if I spoke to them in the open air?" And the idea of an outdoor service took hold on him, and the more he pondered it, the better was he pleased with it. He asked counsel of Dorothy one Sunday when the school was dismissed, and she favoured the notion strongly.

"Great preachers have often won their hold in this way, have they not?" she said; "and why should not you follow in their steps?"

This resolved him ; and that day, at the evening service, he announced that on the following Wednesday a short prayer-meeting would be held in the field behind the church. He invited them all to be present, and begged of them to make his intention known as widely as possible. The village was taken by surprise, and the vicar's announcement was the subject of much discussion and speculation on Sunday evening and the two following days. The friends of the church, whose notions were deeply orthodox, thought the vicar was going out of his way to meet those who would not attend in the regular fashion.

"If sault-wurkurs wunt come tew choorch, let sault-wurkurs be. Divil will settle wi' sault-wurkurs boi-an-boi," was the general comment.

Nevertheless, the vicar having asked them to go, these good folk made up their minds that they would be there, and show the others that some people were not ashamed of church, whether it were under a roof or under the sky.

The party of which Sandy and the young man called Freddy were the acknowledged leaders, held a sort of council of war, and Sandy was for discountenancing the prayer-meeting as they had dis-

countenanced the church. Others, who scented sport in a prayer-meeting in an open field, urged that the men should go in a body, and use their discretion as to interrupting the proceedings, should the anticipation of sport be not realised.

"Doont goo near un, that be moi wurd," was the counsel which Sandy gave, and adhered to.

"She'll be some sport, oi'm thinkin'," said the young man Freddy.

"Let's goo, meets; an' if us doont loike preer-meetin', us can holler.'

And in the end it was agreed that as many men as liked should go; and that any who were afflicted with tedium during the meeting should lift up their voices and "holler," which was to be the signal for "hollerin all roond."

On Wednesday evening, "when the sun did set," Mathew and a little band of friends from the upper end of the village, with John Dorlcote and Dorothy from the house amongst the trees, took up their places in the field, under the shadow of the church. For pulpit, Mathew had a mound of grass that lifted him a foot or two above the heads of the people. As the service

was about to begin, a score or more of men from the Salt Works came up, with Sandy at their head, and stood apart from the others, within earshot of the preacher.

Mathew was nervous, even to trembling, and his pale face had a look almost of weariness. His voice shook a little as he gave out the hymn with which the service opened; but the note was taken up immediately, and before he delivered the brief extempore prayer which followed the hymn, he had gained confidence and strength. Then he opened his Bible, and read a portion of the Sermon on the Mount; and when another hymn had been sung, he prepared to speak. Beckoning to the men in the outer circle, most of whom instinctively drew a step or two nearer, he began:—

“I have asked you to meet me here, that we may talk for a little while about Jesus Christ, and His great love for men. Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself was here on earth, and preached to men, and worked for men, and in the end, died for men. You have forgotten this perhaps, and in forgetting it have forgotten Jesus also.

“But He was here indeed; and the reason that

Jesus came from Heaven to earth was that He might be with men, poor men, men who worked ; and by living amongst them, and sharing their hard life, might learn how to comfort and to help them. This was one reason ; but there was another and a grander reason, which was that by giving Himself up to a cruel and a shameful death, He might make peace with God, His Father, for all the men in the world who had sinned against God, and open for them a way by which, after this life, they might find a home in Heaven, and live with God for ever. Some of you think and say that religion is a thing for rich people, and not for poor people ; but you could not think or say this any longer if you would but remember that it was to the poor that Jesus first spoke on earth, and that it was the poor who first believed in Him, and accepted Him. They were poor men whom He chose for His companions and His friends,—men who loved Him so deeply that they gave up home and parents and living, only that they might be near Him and follow Him. Nay, more than this ; all the while that Jesus was in the world He Himself was poorer than the very poorest man. Every one of

you is better off than Jesus was, for He had not where to lay His head at night. For the poor He used His wondrous healing powers ; curing their sick ones, giving sight to their blind ones, giving strength to their lame ones, giving life to their dead ones. Was this not love for the poor ? Why, the rich people were against Him for this very reason, that they saw Him to be the friend of the poor, and were jealous of the love that the poor had for Him. You think that because you are cold sometimes, and hungry, and because your children are sick, that there is no Jesus above who cares for you ; forgetting in all this that Jesus, too, was cold and hungry, and that He took away sickness from children wherever He found it. Always, and without ceasing, His heart yearned towards the sick and the sorrowful and the weary ; and though He Himself, while He was here, suffered just the same as other men, no one ever found Him too weary to cheer the sad ones, or too impatient to listen to them. There was no one too mean or too humble to be His friend ; no one too miserable for Him to stoop and take away his misery. And one day, when He looked around Him, and saw how much of toil and

suffering there was in the world, He cried out in His great sympathy and love, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." From place to place He went, by day and by night, healing and comforting and teaching the people; the sun of the desert scorching Him, the wind blowing on Him, the dew wetting Him as He lay out at night with no roof above His head. And then came the time when, to make His work perfect, and to show the fulness of His love for men, He saw that He must give His body to be killed. And He, who never had done, and never could do, any sin, took upon Himself the sins of the whole world, and for those sins gave up Himself to be crucified. Oh, wonderful love of Jesus for men! The sufferings of Jesus are past and over, but do not think that He has ceased to care for you. Is it possible that He who once died for your sakes should ever weary of caring for and loving you? Oh no, indeed! From Heaven, His dwelling-place, He still looks down upon the world where once He lived and worked, and His love for those here dwelling is as great and as deep as ever. Oh! if you would but open your ears

and listen, you would hear Him still calling to the weary and the heavy-laden to go to Him and be at rest. Is this the Jesus you are afraid of, and ashamed of? Oh! you men and women, you cannot turn your backs on such a Saviour as this; you cannot any more neglect Him; you must come to Him, and love Him, as He loves you. Is it so hard a thing, then, that I ask you—to meet me for one hour on one day in seven; that together we may read of Jesus in His Book, and together may kneel to Him in prayer, and together may take comfort in the sweet memory of the life He lived, and the death He died for us? Remember that we are here only for a little while, and that when we die there is an eternity of time before us. Remember, too, that we are to spend that time with Jesus, in light, or with His enemy, in darkness. For a short space—a few months, a few years—we are put here to do some work that God has given us; and at His appointed time, whether the work be done or not, we are stopped, and the sleep of death falls on us. Oh, thrice and four times happy they who from that sleep are wakened by the songs of Paradise!”

Mathew paused, but there was no movement amongst the people, who remained as still as the leaves upon the trees, and seemed to expect that he should continue. Mathew had quickly lost himself in his subject, and never saw how greatly the crowd had increased. There were not fifty there when he began to preach, but before he stopped there were more than three times that number. The scene harmonized with the service. The setting sun filled the sky with a crimson glow, and all was quiet around. The people had drawn closer to Mathew, and were then pressing about the mound on which he stood, their faces directed towards his, and some of them had caught something of the fervour which illumined the preacher's. There was no one who did not seem to be listening intently.

Then Mathew, seeing that he had not spoken without effect, and that the minds of his hearers were attuned, raised his voice again, and said :

"Great and good and noble as Jesus was, there is not one of you who may not be like Him. Many of His best and His kindest actions were quite small ones. He spoke a gentle word here, gave a tender look or touched with a loving hand there. He

knew the worth of these small things, and never forgot or neglected them. And in these little nameless acts of love and kindness all of us may imitate Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, and may become His disciples and His ministers. He taught that men should love one another, and be kind to one another's faults, and that a soft answer is the best to overcome anger. Some of these things seem hard when we try to do them ourselves ; but are they *too* hard, when we remember that to do them is to win the love of Jesus ? He did harder things than these for us ; the harder the task—provided that it was for the good of men—the more resolute was He in doing it. He taught, too, that it is a noble thing to deny ourselves, if by so doing we may add to the comfort or the happiness of others ; and His life on earth was one of self-denial from the beginning to the end. Remember, then, that every man who goes without some small pleasure for the sake of his wife and his family is making himself like Jesus ; that every woman who says a gentle word, or lends a helping hand to her neighbour in trouble, is making herself like Jesus ; and that every little boy or girl who refuses to strike back when struck

is making himself or herself like Jesus. And now, one last word about those who are in an especial sense the ministers of Jesus. It was His wish that when He left this world there should be men who would take up His teaching and make it the business of their lives, just as to teach and to preach was the business of His life. Knowing that the precepts He gave to men were such as would bring them happiness if they fulfilled them, He wished that certain men would make it their duty and their profession to carry these precepts about, and impress them wherever they could on men's minds, and urge men to carry them out. This is a part of the work of a clergyman. If I have made you think that the teaching of Jesus was good, then surely you ought not to turn against me because I am trying to persuade you to accept it. Jesus was the Friend and Helper of those amongst whom He worked ; is it wrong of His ministers to try and follow Him in this ? is it just that they should be persecuted for trying it ? How have I harmed any one here, or what wicked or unkind thing have I done that you should turn away from me and shun me ? In God's name, if there be any of you who has anything to say against me, or who can

show me in what better way I might serve you, let him come to me, and say it fairly and openly. Give me but a chance to come near you, and do not bar your hearts to me entirely. I will say no more. I am very glad and grateful that you have come to hear me to-night : will you come again ?”

Mathew finished exhausted ; not from length, but from earnestness of speaking ; and with a few words of prayer he brought the meeting to a close.

The people did not disperse immediately, but remained in the attitude in which they had listened to the preaching, and seemed yet to expect something. But when Mathew moved forward, a path was opened for him in the crowd, and here and there a hand was thrust out for him to grasp. He took every hand that was offered, and spoke to a few, and went from amongst them without a hard word or a scowl.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DORLCOTE GOES A-WALKING.

“**D**ID I not say that you would succeed?” said Dorothy. “I knew that success must come sooner or later, and it has come sooner.”

“I hope that it has begun, at any rate,” answered Mathew, gladly; “but it is only a little that is done yet. Neither you nor I must be too sanguine. Effects of this kind are transient, and I do not look for victory yet.”

“Well, at least a good blow has been struck,” said hopeful Dorothy. “All the village is talking about the meeting last night, and I am sure that many of the people have been touched. Even the salt-workers’ quarter has something kindly to say.”

“This is good news, indeed,” said Mathew; “it puts all my strength into me again.”

They were talking at the gate of Mathew’s dingy little garden. Mathew stood within the gate and Dorothy without. She was going on her

way home from the village ; but I don't know why she took that road, for it was neither the shortest nor the prettiest.

"I have the books ready that I promised you," said Mathew. "I will fetch them for you."

While he was gone Dorothy found herself wondering what the interior of the vicar's cottage was like. Externally it certainly was not attractive, and Dorothy gave a little sigh of pity as she thought that internally it was, perhaps, not much better. And through the open door she caught a glimpse of a room in which the furniture was scanty and of the plainest ; and there was a little inward flutter of resentment at the thought that a clergyman and a vicar should live in so poor a dwelling. But Mathew, as he came down the smoke-stained path with the books in his hand, did not look in the least like a man discontented because his house was shabby ; and Dorothy, who had it in her mind to suggest something, felt that she was reproved.

But all the way home her thoughts—though she tried hard to fix them on the new books—persisted in turning on the vicar's ugly cottage and its meagre furniture ; and in the evening, when

she was showing the books to her father (who had a profound reverence for, though but a slight acquaintance with, literature in general), she said,

"What a desolate, dismal cottage Mr. Girton lives in, father."

"Do he, though?" said John, and his eye roamed over the room which his daughter's hands had made so bright and pleasant.

"And all the flowers in the garden quite killed by the terrible smoke," she went on.

"Flowers quite killed," repeated John; and his eye glanced at the roses and fuschias that thrust their beauty in at the open window.

"And I don't think the house is half furnished; and such very plain furniture," pursued Dorothy.

"Plain furniture," echoed John; and his eye wandered over the stout oaken fittings in his own substantial kitchen.

"And, father, they say in the village that Mr. Girton stints himself to have something to give to the poor. I just peeped at a cupboard that was open in the room, and I couldn't see anything in it."

"Cupboard bare," answered John; and his eye turned upwards to where certain rich and weighty hams depended from the ceiling.

"It must be a hard thing to give away food, even to poor and hungry people, when one has not more than enough for oneself," said Dorothy. "That is self-denial indeed ; but I don't believe I could do it. Could you, father?"

"Could I?" said John; and his fingers outspread themselves involuntarily over his capacious waistcoat. Apparently he could not resolve the question, for he made no further reply, and there the conversation ended.

Dorothy was soon deep in one of Mathew's books, and her father in speculations on the probable price of the new barley.

John Dorlcote was always astir betimes in the morning ; but on the day following the brief talk they had had touching the vicar and his domestic surroundings, Dorothy heard him about at an unusually early hour. Coming down into the kitchen, she surprised him at an extraordinary occupation. He had drawn a good-sized wheelbarrow into the kitchen, and was loading it with a variety of articles. Three enormous hams were wedged in with potatoes, half a sack of flour, and a dozen black bottles, which had been drawn from the dim recesses of the cellar. When Dorothy en-

tered, her father was crowning his labours in an endeavour to balance and secure on the top of the load an armchair of extensive dimensions. When questioned, he entirely refused an explanation of his proceedings. He was, he said, "going a-walking," and the barrow "was a-going with him," and if so be he chanced in his peregrinations to meet with any one "as had a fancy for a ham or an armchair," it might be that he would "drop onto such party" one or both of those commodities. The chair was wedged down upon the hams and the flour, and securely fastened, and the farmer contemplated his finished labours with an air of satisfaction. He drew the barrow out of the kitchen, and placed it under cover in an outhouse, and then returned to breakfast, relapsing into a chuckle whenever he thought himself unobserved, but resisting all the importunities of Dorothy as to the destination of the provisions and the chair. When he had breakfasted, and Dorothy had read him one of his favourite chapters in the Bible,—without which he never entered upon the labours of the day,—the farmer summoned to him a stout farm lad, and bidding him take up the barrow, said that he would direct him where to wheel it. The

expedition started almost as vaguely as that famous one of Abraham and Isaac ; and Dorothy, though she may have had her suspicions, was kept in the dark to the last. John Dorlcote, however, knew quite well where he was going, and when they had crossed the Heron's Bridge, and were out of sight of the house, he put the boy in the road that led direct to Bluebell Cottage. Arrived there, he made the boy set down the barrow, and dismissed him. Then, when he found himself alone, outside the vicar's gate, with the hams, the potatoes, the flour, the black bottles, and the armchair, John was in some trepidation. He wanted to offer them to the vicar, but did not quite know how to do it. To say plump out, "Vicar, I've brought you food and a chair," would, he thought, make the gift savour offensively of charity, and imply a presumptuous suggestion on his part that the vicar was starving, and without furniture. On the other hand, to say that he had brought them to be distributed among the poor, would be to defeat his own purpose, which was, that the vicar should eat the hams and sit in the chair himself.

So without distinctly shaping his course of action, he pushed the barrow up to the door of

the cottage, and knocked in a bashful, uncertain way. There was no answer, and after knocking again, the farmer went round to the back of the house and reconnoitred. Evidently there was no one within. The vicar was away, and so was Mrs. Marrow. This was John's opportunity. Opening the door, he wheeled the barrow close against it, and proceeded hastily and cautiously to remove the contents. Beginning with the chair, and finishing with a bushel or two of apples and some small round cheeses, with which he had laid a foundation in the bottom of the barrow, he had made an end of the work, and stacked the provisions in the middle of the room, and set the armchair in its natural place by the fireside, before any one appeared to disturb him. Then closing the door, and giving vent to a final chuckle at the success of his plot, he took up the barrow, and was preparing to wheel it home, when Mathew made his appearance at the garden gate. Here was John caught, as it were, in the very act; and so abashed and nervous was he, that he scarcely found words with which to return the vicar's hearty greeting.

To Mathew, the spectacle of old John Dorlcote

trundling a wheelbarrow over his garden path was matter for some surprise; and he did not quite know what to make of the situation.

"Are you taking exercise with the barrow, Mr. Dorlcote?" he asked, not knowing in the least what to say.

"Well, vicar, I was a-walking her round, as you might say," replied John, equally embarrassed, and wishing devoutly that he had had just a hundred yards start of the vicar.

"You were going away, I think," said Mathew, "but pray put down the barrow, and come in for awhile. We can find some things to talk about."

Saying this, he opened the door of his cottage, and the manifold results of John's labour displayed themselves upon the floor.

"Why, Mr. Dorlcote," exclaimed Mathew, in astonishment, "what is this? what have we here?"

"There be a tremenjus plentifulness of hams this year, vicar," began John, apologetically; the three big hams, piled one on top of the other, being the most conspicuous objects in the heap.

"But where did all these good things come from?—who brought them?" asked Mathew, still failing to grasp the situation.

"Apples, too," continued John, ignoring the question; "I never see trees bear so afore."

"But what are they doing here?" persisted Mathew, laughing.

"And p'tatoes," went on John; "you'd think the airth didn't breed nothing only p'tatoes, vicar, if you see 'em digged up."

"I'm very glad the year is such a good one," said Mathew; "but even yet I don't quite understand how this fine heap of provisions comes to be lying on my floor."

"Well there it *do* lie, vicar, anyhow," answered John; "and if I were you I wouldn't ask no questions. There has been miracles, and why not miracles again? 'Twouldn't have been nothing only inquisitorialness in Elijah if he'd flustered the ravens about who sent those bread and meat; and what's more, he didn't do it; he just took and eat. Likewise yon widder which had her cruse filled with oil perpetual; there the oil was, plain to view, and the widder she just took and used of it."

Then Mathew began to divine the source whence the hams and the apples came; and perceiving that the farmer's feelings on the subject

were as sensitive as his own, he said, "Well, whoever sent these things has done me a kindly action in a delicate way ; and I assure you, Mr. Dörlcote, I appreciate the gift, and the manner of giving it. But what am I to do with such a store ? "

This question was not inappropriate ; for John, in his impulsive generosity, had victualled the vicar for some three or four months to come. Dorothy, who had made a shrewd guess as to the destination of the wheelbarrow and its contents, knew this well enough ; but would have said nothing had the barrow been laden with stores for a twelve-month.

" But," said Mathew, thinking suddenly of his villagers, " I don't know that there will be too much after all. Of course I couldn't eat or drink a tenth part of these good things myself, but there are poor people in the parish who will very gladly share them with me. And so Mr. Dörlcote, if you knew, or should hear of the kind donor of the hams, the wine, and the flour, you may tell him, please, that I and my people are very grateful to him."

So John was obliged to content himself with this qualified acceptance of his present ; and indeed,

now that the matter was over, he flattered himself that he had conducted it with no small diplomatic skill.

Recovering his equanimity, therefore, he launched into discourse on affairs parochial, and in his warm-hearted, unpolished way took on him to counsel and advise the vicar. On rising to go he delivered himself of this piece of criticism: "I like your sarmons, vicar; I like 'em well: but, if I might be allowed to say it, there's a trifle too much softness in 'em. They're over-full, to my thinkin', of righteous milk, and suchlike. Put a little righteous vinegar in 'em, vicar: it 'ud tingle fokes up wonderful. And, vicar, there ain't no brims'un. It's what I said to Dorothy the first sarmon ever you preached. 'Dorothy,' I said, 'where's the brims'un?' said I. 'It's real out-o-the-way righteous, and uncommon good gospel, but where,' I said, 'is the brims'un?' Dorothy, she ain't as you might say a strong stickler for brims'un, but it's my belief, vicar, if you'd season up a bit with vinegar and brims'un, you'd fetch wonders out o' them salt-workers. Gi' me brims'un enough," said the farmer, as he took up the barrow and went down the garden, "and I'd convart acres of 'em."

CHAPTER IX.

"GIMME MOI BEER!"

THE effect of the preaching in the field was even as Dorothy had described it. It was a blow struck in the cause in which Mathew had hitherto laboured with no apparent result. It did something to break down the barrier which the people in the salt-workers' quarter had raised and kept up between themselves and the vicar.

The bitterest amongst them, indeed, still held out, and showed no signs of relenting.

"Wut's words?" said Sandy, when the sermon was being discussed a night or two after the meeting. "Be yew, meets, a-gooi'n' teu turn and run arter parson 'cos he hev spooke a parcel o' big words? Oi wunt hev choorch noo more now nor oi would afore." But whereas there had previously been almost no dissent from anything that Sandy said or counselled on this subject, he

now found himself speaking amongst a divided party.

"There be summut in wut vicur said, oi'm thinkin'," said another; "oi mun goo nex' Sundee and hear wut he hev tew tauk i' choorch." And this speaker spoke with acceptance to some amongst his mates, who began slowly to be of opinion that there might be no great harm in the parson after all; or, at any rate, that he was less deserving of hate than they had persuaded themselves.

It resulted that there commenced to manifest itself a slight, albeit a very slight, change for the better. The wind which had been long in the east blew in a milder quarter, and the atmosphere of the village was more pleasantly tempered. When the vicar resumed his visits amongst the people in their homes, doors were opened to him which had always before been closed. When he said "good-day" to one in the street, he had a civil answer; and by-and-by some of the men were the first to speak, and touched their caps. All this was greatly cheering to Mathew. He found, however, that this was but the beginning of good. He had not expected to reform the village by

a single sermon, and it was evident that he had not done so. The evil elements against which he battled were removed only over a small area, and his new supporters were very far exceeded in number by those who were still against him, while at the best it could not be said that much real warmth or friendliness of feeling was shown towards him anywhere. There was in some places a cessation of active and open enmity, and evidences of a disposition to friendliness began to appear upon the surface; but this was the most that could be said. The general character of the village underwent no noticeable change. Drunkenness did not cease, nor brutality of words and deeds, except amongst the few who had been touched, and were not ashamed to make some small effort at self-reform; but Mathew, who had seen the village at its worst, felt that he had reason for hope; and he was genuinely thankful, and pressed forward with increased determination. There was a perceptible improvement in the attendances at church, and the open-air meetings, which he continued from week to week, generally drew together a considerable number of listeners. He worked hard

to increase the number of scholars in the little school which he had opened on week-days, and made a partially successful effort to establish other parochial institutions—such as evening classes for the older youths and men, a provident fund, a club and meeting-room, and a sewing-class amongst the women.

Something, no doubt, of the small success which began to attend his labours, he owed to the gradual realisation amongst the people that he was a man who put his own precepts into practice. He had talked about the worth of kind words and small deeds; and his voice, which had a very tender note, was always ready to cheer them, and his hand to help them. He had counselled brotherly love and peace-making; and, wherever he heard of a quarrel, he was untiring in his efforts to heal it. He had spoken of charity; and many a shilling of his slender stipend went every week from his pocket into somebody else's, and many a portion from his poorly-furnished table to the table of one of his humble parishioners. He had said, in a word, that he was ready to spend himself, and be spent in their service; and the people saw that he had not spoken empty words.

He himself was well pleased with the first fractional results of his efforts, and set to work again with fresh zeal. But he knew that the end could not be yet, and he was always watchful.

It was about this time that Jeremiah, Jeremy, or Jerry Dalton, who, having broken down under the severe labour of the brine-sheds, had started business as a general dealer in the village, was urged by his former mates and present customers to make application for a beer license. One tavern was not adequate to the wants of the always thirsty salt-workers, and Jerry was assured of a liberal support if he could procure a license for beer. The matter came to the ears of Mathew, who put himself in opposition at once. There was drunkenness enough in the village already, and he regarded with horror a proposal to increase it. He went from one house to another to take the opinions of the people, and to beg their assistance. To the women he appealed on grounds both moral and practical, showing those who had drunken husbands how terrible and how certain were the effects of drink on the household economy. He pointed to the empty cupboard in houses where the father had wages enough to

keep it well provisioned, and to the tattered clothes of women and children who ought to have gone comfortably and decently clad. Some were on his side, and promised willingly the support he asked. Others said they would have helped if they could, but dare not for the life of them go against their husbands in the vital matter of beer. Some were indifferent, and couldn't see that a public-house more or less mattered to anybody. Others were against him entirely and fiercely; and thought parson had better look to it how he came between the poor salt-worker and his beer. Mathew saw plainly that to persist in his opposition would be to widen again the breach which had seemed inclined to close; but being convinced that the course he was taking was the right one, he held to it firmly.

Once again, he began to encounter ugly glances and to hear threatening words. The men against him were in arms to a man, and not unwilling to try their strength once more against the parson.

"Wut be a toon wi'out plenty pooblics?" asked Sandy, rising to a high pitch of indignation.

"She beent a toon at all,—nobbut harf a toon," answered the young man Freddy.

"Wut be a chap wi'out plenty beer?" asked Sandy again.

"He beent a chap at all,—nobbut harf a chap," answered the young man Freddy.

The breach was reopened ; the old hostile feeling ran higher than ever. The men said and swore that they would have more beer ; the vicar said within himself that they should not.

The day came when Jeremy should go before a magistrate to apply for the license ; and a body of his friends sacrificed a day's wages that they might be present in court, and support him. When the hearing came on, the court was three-parts filled with shaggy fellows from the pit and the brine-sheds ; and Mathew, who had come to oppose the application, took a seat in a remote corner. The legal atmosphere, the aspect of the magistrate on the bench, and the too persistent attentions of the officers of the court, produced in Jeremy an unwonted sense of nervousness, so that he made but a poor figure when called on to give reasons in support of his application. So far as he could be heard,—for his voice, though naturally lusty, shrank to the merest pipe,—he was understood to speak confidentially to the magistrate,

touching the "wunnerful droiness o' moi meets," and the consequent necessity—having regard to their health, comfort, and happiness—that they should be able, at all times, and in all places, to purchase and consume as much beer as their stomachs could contain. Having premised in this fashion, much to the satisfaction of himself and his friends, he digressed upon matters in general, and endeavoured to engage the magistrate in a discussion on the uselessness of parsons, with a view to showing that if the whole clerical race could be promptly and entirely abolished, the world in general, and salt-workers in particular, would gain extraordinary and incalculable benefits. Much to the surprise of Jeremy, the magistrate did not appreciate the conclusions, which, by a unique process of reasoning, he had arrived at; and cutting him short with no great ceremony, observed that his case was a weak one, and that he himself appeared to be rather a stupid fellow.

A voice, which seemed an echo of Sandy's, here called out from the body of the court that "Jerry weren't soo stewpid as he lookt;" but the voice was speedily suppressed.

The magistrate then called upon the Vicar of Lintorn, who, he believed, had something to say in opposition to the application.

As Mathew came forward a general groan began amongst the salt-workers, which was, however, cut short by the announcement of the magistrate that he would have the court cleared if perfect silence were not maintained.

Mathew stated his case in words few and simple. Not entering at all upon the subject of his relations with the salt-workers, or saying anything in disparagement of the village, or any of its inhabitants, he contented himself with showing his intimate knowledge of the circumstances in which the application was made. The applicant, he said, was one of his parishioners; the village was a small one, and contained one public-house, which, in his opinion, was more than sufficient for the reasonable wants of the inhabitants. He did not believe it to be for the interests of Lintorn or its people, that opportunity should be given for any more beer to be sold; and was strongly of opinion that the license should be withheld.

The magistrate said that he was quite satisfied with the statement of the vicar, who was in a

position to know better than any one else the real circumstances and merits of the case. For his own part, he thought that the character of Lintorn, or of a portion of the village, was already sufficiently low in respect of insobriety; and, so far as he was concerned, he would not be instrumental in reducing it still lower. He should, therefore, withhold the license.

Jeremy would have put in another word for himself, but the magistrate said that the court had given him a fair hearing, and recommended him to confine himself in the future to candles and cheese, and let beer alone.

Perceiving that the case was definitely settled against them, the applicant and his friends withdrew, and returned home sulkily enough.

Mathew, as he passed them on the road, heard an ominous growl, and when he had gone a few yards a stone whizzed by within an inch or two of his head. The victory lay with him this time, there was no doubt of that, but the bitter in it mingled in almost equal measure with the sweet.

The men took their defeat with a bad grace, and showed no disposition to sit down under it.

A meeting was summoned to protest against the action of the vicar. It was held on a Saturday, on a plot of bare ground, touching at one point the field where, but a short time before, the vicar had conducted his first prayer-meeting.

The Foreman, whose casual friendliness had been converted again to enmity, was voted to the place of president, and said, in opening the meeting: "Vicur hev come atwixt us an' our bizness, an' seems as we can't do nothin' nor hev nothin' excep' ony wut vicur loikes. Magistreet loikewise hev soided wi' vicur, an' the long an' short on't is, we doon't git noo beer. As free men, an' innerpennent men, an' men as is boi neetur droi, we oughter hev all th' beer wut stummick is eeble fur hold; an' moi wurd is, if we can't git beer i' one wee, we mun look tew git it i' another. Whereboi oi stan' here fur pre-soide over this here meetin', an' prepared fur help carry oot wut yew meets thinks fit fur do."

Sandy Maddick said: "Yew'er pore doontroddin fellers, bleeme me if you een't. Wut! Is parsons tew come an' put noose i' pewter pot, an' seey tew chap as is drinkin' frum her, 'You'er drink enuff, yew sault-worker; drink yew noo more'? Oi seey, it be sheeme. Parson hev talk consarnin'

charity. Wut sort o' charity be it tew goo an' preech afore magistreet as pore chaps has had enuff beer, an' didn't oughter hev noo more? Stan' boi yewer roights, meets. Pore sault-wurkurs! Wut! an' eer you tharsty, an' shall yew not sleek yewr tharst i' pewter pot? Oi seey agin, it be sheeme. Gimme moi beer; that's wut oi waunt. Parson? Whoo be parson? Gimme taul hat, an' whoite scarf, an' black coot, an' bleeme me if oi beent as good parson as eny on 'em. Oi can preech loikewise; an' theerfur oi put it as parsons is noo more, nor noo better'n wut we be, an' hasn't noo call fur come an' plee big 'oss over us. Lastly, or furstly, w'ich yew please, meets, fur doon't marter tew me, oi ask if yew be gooin' to put up wi' short beer, or if yew beent? If soo be yew beent, shuv up fists, an' let's see how many on ye thur be wut is good chaps an' trew."

All hands were held up in response to this invitation; and a resolution, to the effect that parson had no right to come between the men and their beer, and that unlimited beer was their proper and lawful privilege, was carried unanimously.

The young man called Freddy was next put

up to speak, and being a young man of large, if somewhat indefinite views, he counselled measures of resistance on an extensive scale. He did not state in so many words what it was that he would like his friends to do; but he made it understood that, in his opinion, they would cease to be worthy the name of salt-workers, unless they avenged themselves in a tremendous fashion for the cruel wrong that had been done them.

Jeremy Dalton was not called on to address the meeting; but he was placed in a conspicuous position beside the foreman, where it was calculated that the spectacle of him, cheated of his license, and insulted by a magistrate in open court, would work powerfully upon the feelings of his friends.

Job Colting was requested to say something, and expressed his willingness to do so; but as generally happened, when most he needed it, the tongue of Job refused to serve him, and he stood before the assembled salt-workers motionless and dumb. However, his very appearance was effective; for the imagination of the salt-workers transformed Job into a person whom magisterial and clerical oppression had deprived of speech,

and in this capacity he created nothing less than a sensation.

So the men held their meeting, and made their protest ; and the chief result of it was, to increase the bitterness that had been engendered anew against the vicar.

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

TWO or three nights after the meeting of the salt-workers, Mathew had visitors. They were John Dorlcote, and Dorothy his daughter, whom the vicar was entertaining in his diminutive parlour. John's own cheer had provisioned the table, and the meal being over, John himself had settled for a nap in the armchair, which he had lately conveyed from his own kitchen. This was his custom of an evening, but for a week past, under the stern supervision of Dorothy, he had been schooling himself to forego his nap on this particular occasion. For three nights past he had kept awake religiously, but whether it was that he had carried his training just one degree too far, and abused nature, or whether the familiar leathern chair exerted a soporific influence, certain it is that he gave out signs of sleepiness even before the cloth was removed, and despite sundry pinches, and little slaps and frowns from Dorothy, was far

gone in slumber before Mrs. Marrow had retired backwards from the room.

"Father is exceedingly rude; I shall punish him severely for this," said Dorothy; and the good man, her father, all unconsciously, gave forth a sonorous answer from the depths of the chair.

"Oh no, don't do that," replied Mathew, laughing, "let him take his rest peacefully; he deserves it, and enjoys it. He has done his day's work. Will you view my estate?" he went on. "It is neither so large nor so pleasant as yours, but the air outside is fresher than in here."

They went into the garden, and after pacing for a while the narrow path between the borders of box, watching the "solemn shadows" as they sailed over the fields, Mathew led the way to a moulding bench under the branches of what had once been a noble-spreading elm.

Dorothy, who had a lively interest in Mathew's work, had led him to speak on that subject, and he had been talking with more earnestness than usual, for he was full of trouble on account of the new enmity that had arisen against him in the salt-workers' quarter.

Dorothy, who was of a singularly sanguine

nature, was certain that the breach would soon be healed again: she said that Mathew had already made his influence felt in the village, and that he had strong supporters even amongst the salt-workers, whose influence would bear down this new opposition.

But Mathew knew out of his past experience that a quarrel with such men on such a matter was more serious than Dorothy would believe; and that evening, contrary to his habit, he was full of forebodings, said that the worst had not come, and that his cup was not yet full.

But Dorothy was determinedly cheerful, and when she had let Mathew unpack his heart with words, not complaining, but regretful, and tinged with sadness, she sent her mind, and his with hers, into the future, and spoke confidently of the time when the field should be won, the sword of the Lord prevailing.

"You are the very embodiment of hope," said Mathew, kindling again at her words.

"No; better still, of confidence," she answered; and a light of assurance shone in her eyes, and her quiet beauty took a bolder form, and she looked like a good prophethess of old.

Mathew looked on her with an interest fuller and deeper than he had felt before : she met his gaze for an instant, then turned away ; and presently rising, she said, " Shall we go in, the air is growing chilly ? " and she moved away, and he followed her.

It was a night of intense quiet ; not a leaf trembled in the garden, and the fields lay motionless under the darkening sky.

At the door of the cottage they were met by John, wide awake now, and overflowing with apologies, which Dorothy said were no more than his sin demanded, but which Mathew laughingly poohpoohed.

They went in together, but Dorothy said that it was time to go home.

John, not without an effort, for he wore his Sunday garments, and the pockets had not been duly stretched, drew out a silver watch of Brob-dignagian proportions, and studied it attentively.

" 'Tis so," said he. " Maybe vicar will read some Bible, and pray a piece, and we'll begone."

They sat around the table, and Mathew opened the Book at the first evangelist, and without selecting, read where the leaves fell apart, at the final scenes in the wondrous drama of the life of Christ.

He read of Jesus arraigned before His enemies, of the several trials before the unjust judges, of the acquittals before each tribunal, of the blind rage of the mob which would not acknowledge the innocence of the accused, of the weakness and cowardice of Pilate in giving to death the victim in whom he had found "no fault," and whom he well knew to be innocent; of the meekness and nobleness of Jesus before His accusers, of His calm serenity during the shame of the trials; and of his heroism and dauntless fortitude during the nameless cruelties that followed.

Then he knelt, and his friends knelt with him, and in the silence of the little room, not deeper or more religious than the silence which reigned without, he prayed; and was petitioning in his prayer that the hearts of the disobedient might be turned to the wisdom of the just, and that——

But just then a hurried step sounded on the garden-path, there was a loud knocking at the door, and a voice shouted "Vicur, vicur."

Mathew seemed inclined to continue his prayer, but John Dorlcote rose to his feet, and the others followed him; and Mathew went to the door and opened it.

Joe Pegler, his first friend in the salt-workers' quarter, stood there flushed and panting.

"What is the matter?" asked Mathew, hurriedly, with a sense of coming trouble at his heart.

"The lads be a-coomin'—them meets o' moine ; tew hoondred on 'em, coomin' tew thoi house fur beat thee, 'cause o' what thou saidst afore magis-treet," gasped Joe.

John and Dorothy had followed Mathew to the door, and heard the messenger's statement ; and just then a dull roar, as of many voices shouting together, was heard in the direction of the village, and at every second it grew louder and more distinct.

Mathew drew Joe Pegler into the cottage, and bade him tell his tale again ; Dorothy was pale, but with indignation not with fear, and old John trembled with passion. Mathew was cooler and more contained than any of them.

Meanwhile this was what had taken place in the village. Early in the evening, as the day-gang returned from the Works, a curious movement was noticeable in the salt-workers' quarter. The men gathered in groups in their principal quarter, and two or three who seemed to be in authority, Sandy

Maddick foremost amongst them, went from group to group, and seemed to question and to give instructions. This sudden interest and animation on the part of the men was the more noticeable because of the contrast it afforded to their general demeanour of an evening, when they hung about their own doors, or the door of the public, and bored each other with their own listlessness. It was evident, however, that the business in hand this evening was of a definite kind.

At first the men collected in knots of half-a-dozen and a dozen ; but as the evening drew on, and others came up from the works, and swelled the gathering, the several groups began to unite ; and presently a compact and solid body filled the street. Although the men talked amongst themselves there was no noise, but their faces wore an unusual look of excitement. A good many women had joined the crowd, foremost amongst them Betty Pegler. In the front rank were the foreman, Sandy Maddick, and the young man called Freddy.

It being evident that this gathering of the salt-workers was for no good purpose, the two policemen had turned out together, and asked the

meaning of it ; but the men, being in greater force than ordinary, were not particularly careful to answer them.

Sandy, indeed, had volunteered the information that "he and his meets was gooin' fur wauk threw fields," and the young man Freddy supplemented this by stating that their object in walking through the fields two hundred strong, at nine o'clock in the evening, was "tew hev a look at neeture, an' hear the little burds sing."

The constables being rather too old to be caught by chaff of this kind, demanded the dispersal of the crowd, and being refused, a preliminary scrimmage took place, in which one of the officers was wounded in the head by a stone, and carried senseless away.

With appetites whetted by the sight of the first blood the salt-workers raised a shout, and putting themselves in marching order, prepared to move onwards.

Daylight had faded, and dusk was passing into dark, when Sandy Maddick gave the signal for the start, and the band began to move through the village. Once started, there was little doubt about the goal they were making for. Going straight

through the village, they took the way that led to Bluebell Cottage. When they began to march their spirits rose, and they sang and shouted lustily. Some carried in their hands thick sticks daubed with pitch, and others had pieces of tallow-candle and lanterns. Bluebell Cottage stood on rising ground just outside the village, a remote and lonely place. A poor little thing, too, to be the object of attack by a couple of hundred strong fellows; a good-sized barn, one would have thought, would be better sport. And so, perhaps, it would, only vicars did not live in barns. It was not the house that the salt-workers wanted so much as the tenant.

On they came, the noisy and valorous two hundred; conscious principally of two things,—that they had been cheated of their beer, and that it was the parson who had cheated them. To sustain their feelings at the proper pitch, as well as to remind themselves continuously of the noble cause that united them, they had set Jerry Dalton in their front, and placed in his hands a banner, on which three words were painted, one beneath the other, in flame-coloured letters two inches long:—

BEER!

BEER!!

BEER!!!

There was a simplicity and directness about the device that went straight to the hearts of the salt-workers; and their enthusiasm for the standard was in no way diminished by the circumstance that the bearer, who had been drinking copiously to the success of the expedition, evinced a disposition ever and again to trail it in the dust.

The increasing noise of the crowd as they marched on the little cottage was heard within the cottage walls; and of all noises under the sun, there is none more fear-inspiring than that of an angry mob. The bellowing of wind in a storm, and the thunder of waves are terrible; but they are nothing to the sullen roar from the throats of savage men and women.

"What is it these people will do?" asked Mathew of Joe Pegler, his face showing excitement, but no fear.

"Oi cannot see; but this oi do knoo, that theey be real mad, an' at head on 'em is Sandy

Maddick, which is a bad un when his dander's oop," answered Joe.

"They must come then," said Mathew. "I have done my duty, and have no fear of the consequences."

"The lads seey," said Joe again, "that if thou wilt goo tew magistreet an' unseeey what thou hast said, an' speak oop for a loicense for Jerry, noo harm shall come tew thee; but thou canst not do that."

"No," replied Mathew, "I cannot do that. One day they will know that what I have done is the best."

"Ay, maybe they will, *one* day; but that day isn't come, and there's danger now," said John Dorlcote. "Get gone from this. Come home wi' me and Dorothy, and bide the night with us. And hark, they be coming nearer; there's no time to loiter."

Dorothy added her entreaty to her father's. "Do not stay here," she said, "there is no dishonour in going."

"There is," answered Mathew, quietly. "It would be to desert my post, and to admit that I dare not stand by my own acts. I do not court

or brave danger ; but I must abide here in my own house and face these men. But you," he said to John and Dorothy, "you must not stay. If there be danger for one, there is danger for all."

"Nay, if thou'lt not go, let us all bide together. But let us do summat. If we be to stand a siege, we may as well put up the bolts," and he closed and barred the door.

It was impossible to protect the window, for it had no shutters, and indeed there was scarcely a stone or a beam in the cottage that was capable of resisting a heavy shock. The noise of the salt-workers in motion on the road, dull at first, was now sharp and distinct, and individual voices could be heard cheering and shouting.

The five persons in the cottage, Mathew, John Dorlcote, and Dorothy, the old housekeeper,—who showed more concern for her master's safety than for her own,—and Joe Pegler, were together in the little sitting-room.

"Let us join in prayer for a moment," said Mathew, and kneeling down, they all knelt with him.

"It is against Thee, O God, and not against

me, that these men strive. Thou that hast power in one moment to turn sinners into righteousness, and an evil purpose to a good one, manifest Thyself here, and show these people how vain a thing it is to war against the living God. We know that all are Thine at the last; but hasten the time, send down quickly unto these erring ones the lamp of Thy word and the light of Thy love, that shall guide their feet into the ways of holiness and peace."

He had scarcely finished before the baying of the crowd sounded close against the cottage, and the next moment, the low fence that divided the garden from the field was broken and trampled, and the garden thronged with the rioters.

It was now almost dark; those in the cottage could just distinguish a multitude of threatening faces; and the light of the lanterns showed that almost every person, whether man or woman, bore a weapon of some kind. Many carried stakes, which looked as if they had just been torn from the hedges.

The room in which Mathew and his friends were gathered was lighted by a tiny lamp; the rest of the house was dark.

Amid the babel of sounds outside it could just be heard that the men were holding some kind of consultation, some demanding that the house should be fired, others speaking more moderately.

Then one called: "Let's hev parson oot," and a general shout arose, "Parson! Parson!"

Mathew started up, and would have gone to the window, but John Dorlcote laid a hand on him.

"Thou must not risk thyself amongst them; leastways not until we know what they would have with thee. Let me go; these chaps have nothing against me."

And before he could be prevented he went and flung open the window, and showed his sturdy figure to the noisy crowd.

Then there was a commotion in the rear, where those who could not see, but thought that the vicar had come, struggled to get to the front.

"It be Muster Dorlcote," cried those who saw and recognised the farmer.

"Ay, it be; and Muster Dorlcote's ashamed on ye," answered John, whose vigorous notions of fair dealing scarcely fitted him to play the part of diplomatist at such a crisis. "What be the matter wi' you salt-workers? This be a brave thing to

do, to come and trample a man's garden an' holler for him at this time o' day. Get ye home. What has your parson done that ye use him i' this shameful sort?"

"He hev kep' us oot o' beer," answered the young man Freddy, who stood in the front rank of the rioters, brandishing what looked like an enormous broom-handle.

"An' well for ye that he have; though, for matter o' that, some on ye has had more beer nor enough this evening," said John, sturdily.

There was an angry, jeering yell at this, and Sandy Maddick, pushing himself to the front, shouted,

"Stan' back, John Dorlcote. Who be yew, tew put thoisel' agin us. Keep a care we doon't punish thee along o' parson." Then addressing himself to the crowd, he said, "What d' ye stan' an' geepe on him fur? Be ye turned cowardy? If parson wunt come to us, us mun goo tew parson. Breek doon door, an' here goos fur fust stroike." And lifting his stick, he dealt a thundering blow at the door, which shook it to its frail centre.

A perfect tempest of sound and movement now arose in the garden; and shock followed shock, as

though the men were flinging themselves against the door in the effort to break it down.

"Let me go," said Mathew to Joe Pegler, who tried to hold him as he started forward; and going to the window he stood there quietly, and lifted his hand in a vain effort to obtain silence.

The garden swarmed with the rioters, who surged to and fro like the tossing of waves in a narrow creek. All were struggling to get near the cottage, and in the struggle the weaker were thrown to the ground, where they screamed unheeded. The women, of whom there were a score or more, were amongst the most violent; and these were headed by the giantess Pegler, who dealt about her with a heavy wooden mallet, as she tried to force her way to the front. Many of the lanterns had been broken, and lay on the ground with wicks feebly flickering; those that were yet alight threw a pallid glare over the scene.

Failing to quell the noise, Mathew raised his voice, and said that he was willing to speak with, and be judged by them, if they would but hear him.

"Have you a leader?" he asked. "Let him come to the front, and tell me in one word what

you would have with me. I am willing to do anything that is just and honourable."

No one answered his appeal, but a dozen of those who were nearest to the window pressed round it, threatening him with their sticks.

Once again Mathew asked them what was their will, and then Sandy, thrusting himself right against the window, said,

"Wilt goo back tew magistreet, an' ask him give Jerry Dalton the loicense?"

"No; I will not do that," answered Mathew.

"Yew hear, meets," cried Sandy, turning to the crowd, "he wunt ask fur loicense."

"We'll hev nowt else," cried one of them.

"We'll hev parson himsel'," said the young man Freddy, and with one voice they cried, "We'll hev parson; fetch oot parson."

Now for the first time they seemed all to be agreed as to a definite object, and bent their whole strength to attain it.

"Breek doon the door," urged Sandy, who hopped about on his wooden leg, twirling his stick round his head, and piping shrill encouragement.

The men collected for a rush at the door. Mathew, divining their purpose, called loudly

through the window: "Stay; I will come to you. There are women within here. Wait but an instant, and I will give myself to you."

It was too late. Driven on by those behind, the foremost of the mob were literally hurled against the door, and panels, bolts, and all gave way with a crash. The mob poured through the doorway into the passage, and on into the room where the five besieged were gathered. John Dorlcote, his face flushing darkly, and his big fists clenched, and Joe Pegler, a grandly muscular stripling, tried to throw themselves in front of the other three; but Mathew refused to be shielded, and thrust himself between them, Dorothy and the old housekeeper being in the rear.

There was a momentary pause on the part of the assailants, and the two parties confronted one another. In the front rank of the salt-workers were the foreman, Sandy Maddick, his wife, the young man Freddy, and Jerry Dalton.

"Give us oop the parson," said the foreman to John Dorlcote and Joe.

"Get ye home, George Brodie, or ye'll rue this day," answered John, his voice husky with passion. "'Tis your place to keep the peace amongst these

folks, and you're leadin' them on to break it. Get back, and take these men and women wi' you, or 'twill be a bad night's work for all on ye."

"Who be yew tew preete at me?" said the foreman with an oath, and he made a stride forward to seize hold of Mathew.

John Dorlcote advanced a half-step to meet him, and with a savage guttural sound deep down in his throat, raised his arm and struck a terrible blow at Brodie, who would have measured his length on the ground, had he not fallen backwards upon the men behind him.

A roar went up from the salt-workers, and they swept forward, flooding the narrow room. Mathew and his defenders were driven against the wall, and behind them Dorothy and the old woman.

"For God's sake, get back; you are crushing two women to death," shouted Mathew; and he, with Joe Pegler and John, struggled might and main to keep a breathing space for their companions. In these efforts they were quickly aided by those of the rioters who were nearest to them, for not women only, but men also, were threatened with death by squeezing and suffocation.

Butting and pushing with heads, backs, and

shoulders, kicking and striking with feet and fists, they turned the stream of the crowd towards the door again, and after swaying uncertain for a moment, the whole mass gave way, and poured out again into the garden. They had got Mathew in their midst now, but John and Pegler stuck close to him, and used their fists freely.

Dorothy and Anne Marrow were left unnoticed in the house, which was now empty of the rioters. The old woman, partly from exhaustion and fright, and partly from the pressure she had sustained in the crush, had swooned, and, for the moment, Dorothy was busy with her. She stayed with her until she had recovered her senses, then put her to bed, and shut her into her room, to secure her from further possible molestation; and leaving the house, hastened to where the crowd were wrangling over their prisoner in the field just beyond the garden.

There was a question what they should do with Mathew now that they had got him; but this was not argued quietly, for in the very centre of the crowd John Dorlcote and Joe were struggling to set him free, so that a continuous hand-to-hand fight raged where they were.

It was a sight that would have frightened and sickened Dorothy at any other time, but the spectacle of innocent weakness stricken down by ruffianism roused the woman in her, and with hot cheeks and flashing eyes, she cried,

"You cowards; oh, you cowards! Shame on you! Are there no men amongst you?"

But the mob were too far gone in passion to heed or hear her; and now they were in motion again, for someone had suggested that the parson should be taken to the pit. The pit was a disused gravel-pit, a quarter of a mile away at the end of the next field; and towards it the whole pack turned, hurrying along with Mathew in their midst, Joe Pegler and John, who were now reinforced by the second of the two constables, keeping as close to him as possible.

Dorothy's words having produced no effect, she turned and ran swiftly through the dark in the direction of the village.

There was no moon that night, and heavy clouds obscured the stars. The field over which the salt-workers were dragging their victim was rough and uneven, and amid the stumbling, pitching, and jostling of the mob, as they pressed on one

another's heels, Mathew would often have been borne to the ground, but for the friendly arms that supported him from behind.

In about ten minutes they came to the pit. It was fifty feet deep, with rugged sides, the edges protected by heaps of gravel and a fringe of gorse.

Mathew, pale, and bleeding slightly from a cut on the forehead, was pushed to the mouth of the pit. The foreman, with his hand on his collar, gripped him tightly and said,—

“Wilt do what we want o’ thee?”

“No,” answered Mathew, “I cannot do that.”

“Fore God, then, thou shalt goo doon pit,” said the foreman, and pushed him forwards. But he himself at that moment was seized from behind by Joe Pegler, who caught him round the throat with one hand, and with the other, clenched, and hard as a flint, struck him a terrific blow at the back of the neck, which brought him half-senseless to the ground. But no sooner was Brodie down, than his place was taken by the big fellow who had been Mathew’s first assailant, and who endeavoured to do for him what the foreman would have done but for the sledge-hammer fist of Joe Pegler.

John Dorkcote flung himself on this giant, and wrestled with him on the very brink of the pit. For a moment the issue was doubtful; for though the farmer had the advantage in breadth of loin and shoulder, the other was taller by more than three inches; but while they wrestled fiercely, there was a noise of voices and of feet trampling in the near distance.

Dorothy, running with speed to rouse the upper village, had been met by a hundred of its people coming to the rescue of the vicar. Two of them were mounted, and the whole band, strong and steady as a phalanx, came up at a sharp trot, and closed instantaneously with the rioters on the edge of the pit.

The two who were mounted had been counselled by Dorothy, and leaving their horses in her keeping, fought their way through the thick of the fray to where Mathew and his defenders were. Already the violent swaying of the crowd, and the shock consequent on the rush of the new party, had separated John and his fellow-combatant, and a hurried whisper in the farmer's ear apprised him of the means of escape that were at hand. At that time there was but a single

lantern in the whole crowd, held by one whose place was near to Mathew, where the fight was sharpest.

John made a sign to Joe Pegler, who struck the arm that held the lantern, and it fell to the ground, leaving the scene in almost total darkness. Five men then—Dorlcote, Pegler, the two who had come on horseback, and the constable—closed round Mathew, and hacking a path clean through the crowd, emerged on the side near to where Dorothy stood holding the horses.

Mathew, who was faint and weak, but not seriously hurt, was lifted in the strong arms of Joe Pegler, who bore him to one of the horses, and assisting him into the saddle, mounted beside him.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Mathew.

"Home, sir," answered Joe.

"But I cannot go like this," said Mathew, and he made an effort to spring from the saddle. But his weakness overcame him, and he clung to the pommel for support. Nevertheless he repeated, "I cannot go like this. It is cowardly to run from them in this fashion. Let me return, and speak with them. I pacified them once before, I can do so again. Let me go back."

"'Twere madness," said John Dorlcote, resolutely. "Words wouldn't stop them lads to-night. Let 'em get hold o' thee again, and us five, ay, an' all them labourers along of us, couldn't save thee. Hast seen what they can do, when they're mad. What did words avail i' the house? and they'd avail thee less now. Come away wi' us. Leave talkin' till the men be sober. They'll be in another mind to-morrow."

And lifting Dorothy into the second saddle, he put himself before her, and turned the horse's head towards Bluebell Cottage.

Mathew, overcome rather by the sense of his bodily weakness than by the words of the farmer, let himself be taken, and they rode quickly up the field.

The fight went on sharply at the pit's mouth, where the escape had scarcely yet been discovered.

The cold night air did something to revive Mathew, but he was pale as death when they took him from the saddle. The garden was wrecked, and the door of the cottage hung feebly upon its hinges. Within, all was disorder, and the farmer half-reproached himself that he had not taken Mathew to his own home. He proposed

this, and begged Mathew to go, but Mathew would not be prevailed on, and indeed, he was hardly in a state to take another journey that night. Joe Pegler insisted on remaining at the cottage until morning; and it was dawn before John and Dorothy returned across the fields to the quiet homestead above the Heron's Bridge. The hoarse murmur of the rioters, still fighting as they took their way back to the village, was carried far on the breeze; and through the window of his cottage Mathew could see the ruined garden and the shattered fence which were the crown and guerdon of his labour.

CHAPTER XI.

AT JOHN DORLCOTE'S.

THE first week that followed the riot was the heaviest Mathew Girton had known in Lintorn. He was full of despair, and sad and sick at heart. He must have been sorely beaten down, for his was a nature that seldom yielded to opposition ; and he took placidly enough such buffetings as came to him in his Master's service. But this last experience was a new and a bitter one ; it wounded him deep down ; and he was bruised sore, as though the men had stoned him as well as his cottage. Prostrated in mind, his moral as well as his physical energies were frozen. And, as before, a chief source of his suffering was the thought that there lay in himself something which was the real cause of his failure, yet he could not put a finger anywhere and say with conviction, It is here or here that I am weak.

In his sadness he thought that he was aban-

doned, but it was not really so; and even while he felt most alone, there were sympathies strong and warm encircling him.

The upper village was moved in quite an unusual manner; its feelings, ordinarily somewhat sluggish, were roused in the vicar's behalf, and a number of the older people waited upon him with words of sympathy, and testimony of kindness and goodwill. The younger men, feeling that the whole village was disgraced by the outbreak of the salt-workers, were for constituting themselves the champions of church and vicar, and righting matters by going out in a body to do mischief to the rioters. So high did feeling run amongst them that a pitched battle was imminent every evening; and but for the strong and persistent remonstrances of the vicar, who declared indeed that were there any more turmoil on his account he would go out of the place forthwith, the two parties would certainly have fought again. For a long while there were mutterings and glowerings when a labourer met a salt-worker, and the whole atmosphere of the little village was charged with hostility.

Mathew, however, soon roused himself; and shaking off despondency, took up again his accus-

tomed round of duties. Visiting as usual in the salt-workers' quarter, he found that even there they were not all enemies. In the very centre of disaffection there were some, both men and women, who had learned to know and trust him; and these, where they dared, were outspoken in his praise, and strong in indignation at the cruelty that had been done him.

In another place, too, Mathew had true and tender friends,—in the quiet homestead amongst the trees above the Heron's Bridge. Mathew's steps had bent often of late in this direction; he liked to go there, and he went, not questioning himself what it was that drew him.

The fields that way were pleasant, and there the sky was bare, and all undimmed by smoke; and the noises of farmyards were not like the noise of the Salt Works. When Mathew had worked the day in his parish,—and it was there that he spent all the best hours of the week,—he turned willingly to follow the course of the river, where it led to the smoke that curled amongst the elms.

It was October, and the air was crisp and sparkling, and the firm ground echoed the foot-fall, and only to walk was a keen delight.

Summer had gone, but a little of the spirit of summer lingered in the sunbeam that whitened the stubble-fields where the corn had been. Half the leaves had fallen from the trees, and half still clung to their branches, and kept to the last their brown and red and yellow tints. The grass was green, but the rushes by the river's brink followed the fashion of the leaves, and were coloured with many colours. In many a field the plough turned up the strong dark earth, and in farmyards the wheat, as yet unthreshed, stood high in stacks. In her father's orchard, Dorothy shook apples from a tree, the sweetest piece of nature there.

At church, and in the village, Dorothy, both in dress and tone, was demureness itself; but at home she put away restraint, and went lightly and gaily in print gowns with upturned sleeves, that showed an arm the sun had never browned.

Between Dorothy and Mathew—both by nature shy—shyness had worn itself away long ago; they met, and talked, and looked at one another with the frankness and freedom of pure and simple friendship.

“What have you to say for mission work now?” said Mathew laughing, but with the least shade of

bitterness in his tone; "Are you for a missionary still?"

"That's not quite a fair question," she replied. "But don't think I spoke in praise of mission work, believing it to be all smooth. When I said it was grand, it was of the hardships and the disappointments I was thinking. But, indeed, I am very angry with those men. Cruel and shameful it was of them, and cowardly, too; and I never believed them cowards."

"A little while back I thought that I must give it all up, and go away, confessing myself and my work a failure," said Mathew.

"Oh no! You would never do that," she answered earnestly. "You could not, and dare not do that. You the captain, and leave your ship when she was sinking."

"No! I have put those thoughts behind me, and I do not mean them to come again," spoke Mathew. "But though the captain stay, the ship still sinks."

"Not so, not so," said Dorothy eagerly, pausing in the act of pulling down a bough. "I say there is no sinking now; and for you to say so is almost as bad as to talk of quitting the ship. I think of

you sometimes as a new Christian, in a new "Pilgrim's Progress"; only I always say to myself, 'We will, if you please, omit Giant Despair from this edition.' Oh no! there is no sinking now. I look to see the leak stopped, and better speed under a fairer sky."

"You are always full of comfort."

"It is my duty," she laughed, "while there is so much need of comfort."

"What troubles me again and again," said Mathew, "is that I cannot learn exactly where it is that I am lacking. And yet the real fault must be mine."

"I would rather hear you say so, even though I know it to be wrong," she said, "than hear you put the blame where it should indeed lie. But in truth I am sure the fault is not with you. If there has been a fault up to now in your dealings with the people, it is that you have dealt too gently by them. You have been tender always when you should sometimes have been rough."

The tree was stripped, and two big baskets filled with the spoils. "Now these must be stowed in the loft," said Dorothy, and stooped to take up a basket. Mathew went to take up the other, but

the baskets were deep, and filled to overflowing ; and Dorothy could not lift hers, and Mathew could not lift his. So they joined their labours, and each took a handle of one, and carried it between them, and came back and fetched the other. And before the apples were all stowed, the farmer came in from the plough, with good brown clay clinging to his boots and gaiters, and would not hear of Mathew's leaving until he had gone in with them to drink tea. It was the brief time of the day which Mathew called his own, and as he never needed to be bid a second time when he had made up his mind to stay, he said "Thank you," and went in with them.

A wonderfully comfortable place was the square kitchen in John Dorlcote's, when the hearth was swept under the crackling fire, and the flames leapt out and danced upon the burnished floor, and on the quaint oaken furniture, and the great silver mug that stood upon the dresser.

John was an age trimming himself for the meal, for when the vicar sat in the kitchen it looked to John like church, and he could not take his own seat in comfort until he was dressed in his Sunday clothes. John's scruples on this point were a cause

of much concern to Mathew, who felt pity for him in the collar of prodigious height and stiffness which he reserved for these occasions.

Some of Mathew's despondency still hung about him, but John would not hear of it that matters were not now going to mend.

"I wish, indeed, that I could think so," sighed Mathew; "but the ground is very stubborn. I have tried hard, but I cannot break it."

"Keep on tryin', vicar; keep on tryin'," said John. "Good heart! don't leave the groond becos she's stubborn. Where's the groond anywhere that wasn't stubborn at the first? Where's the groond that ever gave up a sixpence 'till you'd beat her, and broke her first? Where, think you, vicar, would this farm o' mine ha' been, if I'd ha' given up all the stubborn land when first I come to it. Weeds and suchlike I might ha' growed, and plenty, but never an ear o' corn."

"Father's right——" began Dorothy; but the farmer would not be interrupted.

"Right?" exclaimed he, banging with his fist on the table, until he shook all the tea out of his saucer, "sartin sure he's right. Why, vicar, see over yon," pointing in the direction of the bridge,

“oot yon’s a field o’ mine that was stubbornner nor any field ever I tilled. I took yon field in hand, and for five year I worked her. Every year I brought her on a piece. The first year she gave me nothing, and the second year she gave me nothing, and the third year she gave me just so much as paid the hire o’ the men, and the fourth year better, and the fifth year better again; and this very year I’ve raised wheat out o’ that field, that’ll stan’ me in—please the Lord, and the market don’t fall—at fifty shillin’ the quarter.”

“Enough, John, enough,” said Mathew; “you shame me, indeed. I do not mean to leave my stubborn ground yet, at all events.”

They lighted him to the path that sloped to the bridge, and good-nights were exchanged.

In the distance, lights were moving rapidly on the road between the village and the Salt Works, and a sound of voices was borne on the still night air.

“Father,” said Dorothy, nervous and trembling, “what is the matter over there? I heard a noise like a cannon as I opened the door.”

“I heard it, too,” said John, and his face took

an anxious expression as he watched the lights on the road.

And now the lights multiplied, and they moved all in the direction of the Works, and the noise of the voices grew louder.

"Father," said Dorothy, very pale, as she caught her father by the arm, "I believe there is an accident in the pit."

"I believe so, too," answered John.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ACCIDENT IN THE PIT.

IN a few minutes Mathew and the farmer were on their way to the Salt Works, the farmer taking the lead, with a lantern to guide them across the fields.

"I can't make it oot," said John; "there hasn't been an accident i' the pit these fifteen years; I don't see how it be possible."

Be that as it might, something unusual was happening in the neighbourhood of the Works; for as Mathew and his companion neared the road, after a heavy tramp over the fields, they saw the people from the village swarming along it, and all shaping their course one way. They joined the throng, but could learn nothing, except that "Summut was wrong i' the pit." Over the draw-bridge the people crowded, and on into the yard, where it was never an easy matter, and at night a very difficult one, to make progress amongst the

heaps of burnt coal or "slag" from the furnaces, salt spoiled in the making, and other kinds of refuse and litter innumerable.

The pit lay in the corner of the yard farthest from the entrance, a wooden pent-house was built over the mouth, and under it was fixed the machinery for hoisting the great deep buckets to the surface. From the pit, or Rock Pit, as it was called, the salt was obtained in "rock" form by blasting; and the method of obtaining it had been perfected to such a degree that accidents were believed to be almost impossible; indeed, as John Dorlcote said, no mishap had occurred for fifteen years.

What was strange, too, was the hour at which the accident—for such it evidently was—had occurred, work in the pit being usually over at an early hour in the evening. It transpired afterwards that an order had been received that day for a large quantity of rock salt to be shipped at once to Russia; and the foreman, acting on his own responsibility, had prevailed on the men to work several hours beyond the regular time.

The people pressed around the pit's mouth, with lanterns in their hands, and looked anxiously down,

but all was dark and silent below. The mischief, whatever it was, had been wrought; but there was dread and horror in the silence of the pit. It contrasted strangely, too, with the babel of voices around the opening and in the yard beyond. Some who had husbands, sons, or brothers below, pressed through the crowd up to the pit's mouth, and besought help from those who knew not what help to give.

"Get oot booket, an' lower her," was the general cry, and a call was made for the man who had control of the machinery; but he could not be found, and nervous and unskilled fingers were trying to set the heavy pulleys at work, when a tall powerful form came pushing its way through the throng of terrified women and boys, and a strong hand took possession of the rope, and quickly had the bucket ready for use. It was John Dorlcote, and the crowd fell back before his resolute action.

"What's oop?" he asked, looking around at the forms but faintly visible in the flickering light of three or four lanterns.

"We doon't rightly knoo," answered a chorus of voices, "there was a big bang, an' noot after it."

"Where be all t' men?" asked John again; "one on ye speak, a can't hear th' lot o' ye."

"There be a greet skittle match over to Wee-kering the night," said a middle-aged, care-worn woman who stood near John, "most o' th' men be gone there. The rest be in pit."

"Who'll go doon wi' me?" asked John, raising his voice.

"I will go with you," said Mathew.

"Let me go, John Dorlcote, parson be noo good," shouted a number of anxious voices, and women and boys crowded up to the bucket.

At this moment three of the furnace men left their fires and came running up.

"We'll go doon, farmer," they exclaimed, as soon as they heard what was wanted. "Booket, her'll hold four on us. Leave parson up wi' th' women folk."

"But," said Mathew, quietly, "who is there here strong enough to let the bucket down with you four in it?"

"Vicar be right," said John Dorlcote, "his head 'll be worth more i' th' pit than all our hands. Jump in, vicar, I'll let you four doon, and the women folk can manage to send me afterwards."

Mathew stepped quickly into the bucket, waiting for no second bidding, and the three men silently followed him.

"Wait till I'm doon afore ye stir," shouted John, and the bucket began its dark descent. It was as curious a journey as Mathew had ever taken, and not a pleasant one, for sometimes the rope that held the bucket jerked, and the bucket struck the wall of the pit with a violence that threatened the safety of those who were in it. Huddled together, they clung fast to the rope, the farmer's lantern, which Mathew still carried, shedding a faint glimmering light around them as they went swiftly down the narrow shaft. At length they touched ground, and stepped out into the blackness that might almost be felt on every side, and waited silently. John Dorlcote, at the pulley above, feeling the rope slacken, paused a minute, and then began rapidly to wind the bucket up. When it reached the top he glanced around, and in the faint light his gaze met a pair of calm brown eyes, steadily watching him with a quiet, questioning sort of look.

"Ay, ay, Rachel Jackson," he said, in answer to the look, "I can trust ye wi' booket; look sharp and tak t' rope."

Rachel stepped forward without a word, and laid a firm grasp on the pulley. She was a young woman of five or six-and-twenty, tall, and well-made, with round muscular arms and strong work-hardened hands. Her husband was amongst the men in the pit, but she made no outcry; John felt sure, however, that she would never leave her post.

"Stand by till some on us calls up to ye," he said; "we may want tools or more help at any moment."

She nodded without speaking, and John Dorlcote got into the bucket.

"Let we go doon wi' ye, Master Dorlcote, mebbe us can do summat."

It was Rachel's brother who spoke, a lad of sixteen, who, with his younger brother, stood eagerly waiting for John's answer.

The farmer hesitated a moment, and looked at Rachel. "Let 'em go," she said briefly, and in another minute John and the lads were speeding down the dark shaft to join their comrades, whilst the frightened women above crowded more closely round Rachel, and peered into the gloom of the shaft, hoping to catch some sound that might give them hope that the men in the pit below were living.

John Dorlcote and his recruits stepped out of the bucket when it touched the ground, and joined the first party in silence. They had no light but the faint glimmer of Mathew's lantern, and the silence and darkness of the pit were fearful.

"We ought to ha' brought some candles," said the farmer in a whisper.

"I have candles," said Mathew, quietly. "I got a few in the yard," and he produced half-a-dozen small candles from his pocket.

"Heads be better nor hands," said the farmer.

The death-like silence of the pit struck the whole party with fear. There must have been twenty or thirty men in the pit at the time of the explosion; where were those men now?

Mathew distributed the candles, having first lighted them at the lantern, and sticking the ends into little lumps of clay, the party pushed forward, headed by Mathew and the farmer. They were all more or less strange to the pit, and had no idea in which direction the men had been blasting at the time of the accident; for that there had been an accident, and a serious one, could no longer be doubted. The pit was large, and comprised several divisions, but its echoing sides would have carried

the sound of voices from its remotest depths had any workmen been stirring or speaking. The dead silence that met the exploring party was more hopeless, more awe-inspiring than cries or groans.

The pit was very dark, but except for a certain closeness the air was not unpleasant ; and, breathing easily, the party pushed their way forward, wondering that they found no marks of internal disturbance. Here and there, however, the path was partially blocked by a rocky mass of amber-coloured salt, and in one place they stumbled upon a truck thrown over on its side. ●

Suddenly, Mathew, who was the foremost of the party, felt his foot strike against something that yielded, and lowering his lantern, and calling to those behind him to halt, he stooped, and saw the prostrate figure of the young man Freddy. They rubbed his hands, and the farmer applied brandy to his nostrils ; and in a few moments he opened his mouth, and swore volubly. They gave him brandy to drink, and in a few minutes he had regained his senses completely. He stood up, and did not seem to be hurt in any way. When questioned how he came to be there, he said that he had heard a loud bang, and was thrown suddenly

to the ground. He knew the direction from which the report had come, and being then quite recovered, took a candle from one of the party, and went on in front, the others following.

The finding of the young man Freddy unhurt did something to restore confidence, but as yet nothing had been seen of the great body of the men who had gone down into the pit in the morning, and had not appeared since. The young man Freddy was confident that the rest would be discovered; he had heard as big a bang as that, he said, and knew no harm come of it.

They proceeded cautiously, however, picking a slow and wary course over blocks of yellow salt, and avoiding contact with the massive square pillars on which the roof rested. Presently lights twinkled ahead, and then the party entered a passage on either side of which candles were fixed in clay holders. These were almost burned out, one or two flickered feebly in their clay sockets, showing that they must have been burning some hours. But there was neither sign nor sound of the men by whom the candles had been lighted.

["It's kind o' fearsome like," whispered John Dorl-

cote stopping short, and turning to speak to the young man Freddy ; " we be like wandering sperrits among the dead ; hadn't we better holler ? "

The young man Freddy, who was so confident at the first that no harm could have happened, was beginning to look as scared as some of the others, and to walk as softly. They felt that they might at any moment step upon the prostrate body of a dead or wounded miner. " Wheer's t' use o' hollerin' ? " he replied, glancing round him half fearfully ; " pit doant go above a hundred yards deeper, if th' men was hereabouts, they'd hear us wi'out noo hollerin' . "

" They must be here, dead or alive , " replied John ; " there's no way oot o' pit except by t' booket, and no man went that way . "

" Let us go on to the end , " said Mathew, and with a firm step, but an anxious face, he went first, and led the little party on through the narrow passage, over rugged heaps of shining rock salt ; carrying his lantern low, and scanning the ground narrowly as he went, until he was met by a steep bank of rock salt, reaching to the roof, which was considerably lower here than in some places. This, apparently, was the end of the pit.

"We can get no further this way," said Mathew.

As he spoke, the young man Freddy pushed past him, and stood staring with a puzzled air at the heap of sparkling salt piled before him.

"'Twarnt loike this heer the mornin'," he said slowly. "Oi be certain zure as pit went further nor this ; not much, but oi comed through passage, and into a little sort o' room."

"Be sure, lad ?" asked the farmer.

"Zertain darned zure."

The men looked at each other ; it was worse than they had feared. They had expected to find the miners hurt, wounded, some perhaps killed ; but if the young man Freddy was right in what he remembered, the men must all be buried under those rugged blocks of salt.

"We must dig," said the farmer promptly ; "get shovels, lads, and to work sharp ; mebbe some's alive yet."

"Hark !" said Mathew suddenly, in a voice that startled everyone, and stopped the men as they were hurrying away for shovels. They all listened an instant, but heard nothing, and the young man Freddy gave a sneering look at the vicar, but Mathew took no heed. Setting his lantern on the

ground, he placed both hands to his mouth and gave the short ringing cry that had been the cry of his cricket-club in his college days, whilst the men stared at him, and John Dorlcote wondered "what vicar was oop to."

But to every one's amazement Mathew's cry was echoed faintly by more than one voice from the depths of the rock salt.

"There are some alive, at all events," exclaimed Mathew. "The men are walled in by the fall of salt. Quick, boys, with the shovels; every minute may mean a life."

Down the narrow passage, where the almost burnt-out candles still threw a shimmering light, and into the pit beyond, rushed men and boys; shovels lay about in plenty, and each one snatched the first that came to hand, and hurried back to release the imprisoned from their living tomb. They began in hot haste, cutting and dragging away the huge lumps of crystal, and throwing them behind,

"Farmer," said Mathew, when he had stood an instant spade in hand watching the energy of the men. "Farmer, wouldn't it be better if we just opened a passage by piling the salt up on either

side ; we shall build ourselves in if we throw it all behind."

The men stopped in their work, and John Dorlcote scratched his head.

"Vicar be roight, lads," he said, after a moment's pause ; "we're a-goin' at it too hasty like. I said as we should want the use o' his head ; a good head passon has for our wurk as well as his'n."

The young man Freddy muttered to Rachel Jackson's brother that "parson warn't so fuleish as some parsons," and his manner became more friendly. Mathew worked bravely with the rest, wielding his heavy iron shovel manfully ; but he was unused to such heavy muscular work, and John Dorlcote noticed that his face grew pale, and he flagged a little in his exertions.

They had worked hard in unbroken silence for half an hour, and were beginning to make a sensible impression upon the huge mass of salt before them.

"Gi' the cry, vicar," said John, pausing in his work, and Mathew, laying down his shovel, put his hands to his mouth and made the pit echo with his call.

Again it was answered, and this time less faintly than before ; the men gave a cheer of encouragement, and fell to work more briskly than ever.

"Vicar," said John again, "could 'e find th' way to shaft, think 'ee?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Mathew; "is anything wanted?"

"Well, ye see it's all a matter o' time now; the sooner we let air into the men the more lives we'll save, and there's no danger i' pit now; some o' they lads a top might come down and help shovel; if you'd fetch 'em it 'ud quicken matters i' th' end."

"So it would," replied the vicar, "I will go."

"And bring a drop more sperrit back with ye," called out the farmer, "mebbe it'll be wanted."

Mathew had a good head for locality, and was not very long in getting back to the shaft. He found Rachel Jackson at her post, and was promptly lifted into the upper air.

The women crowded around with anxious questions. "What be matter, vicar? Where be t'other ones?"

Mathew told briefly how matters stood in the pit, and the uncertainty that existed as to how many lives could be saved. He asked for volunteers, and a dozen boys were at his side in a moment. Selecting the four biggest and strongest he made them get candles from the foreman's shed,

explained whereabouts in the pit the accident had occurred, and told Rachel to let them down. He then sent a boy to the village for brandy, and whilst waiting for his return, he spoke a few words of hope and comfort to the anxious women gathered about the pit's mouth ; finally persuading them to kneel down with him in this hour of trouble, and ask God's mercy for the husbands and fathers buried in the pit. Even the roughest woman there knelt down with him under the starry sky, and one or two sobbed aloud as Mathew offered up a short and simple prayer.

When his messenger arrived, Mathew, placing the brandy in his pocket, and bidding the women be brave, and prepare as far as they could to help any who were injured when they were brought up, he stepped into the bucket, this time taking his dark journey down the shaft alone. As he neared the scene of the accident in the pit a ringing cheer burst upon his ear.

"That sounds hopeful," he exclaimed, and hurried on over the rough ground. The men were working hard in the greatest excitement. John Dorlcote and one of the furnace men were in the van, the others, forming a line behind them, shovelled on

the salt that was rapidly passed to them. The cheer had arisen when they distinguished Sandy Maddick's voice calling to them from the inside. Two or three minutes afterwards the first gap was made in the thick wall of salt, and another ringing cheer echoed through the pit.

"Be ye all theer?" asked John Dorlcote.

"Oi think so," answered the foreman's voice ;
"but it's so bleemed dark, and we be squoozed oop, a can't roightly tell."

"Be any hurted?"

"A doan't roightly knoo. Pass a loight, and meeke the gap a bit bigger."

A lantern was passed in, and the men set to work again with a will, and in a quarter of an hour the foreman squeezed his way out of his prison followed by his men, some of them cut and bruised and bleeding, but all alive. The blasting was to be done at the end of the little passage, and the men had all retired into the "sort o' little room" the young man Freddy had described to be out of the way, but whether the charge of powder was too large, or whether the roof was weak, or from both these causes, a tremendous blast followed the igniting of the fuse, and the whole roof seemed to

come about their ears, and when the stunning and blinding effect of the downfall had passed, the men found themselves completely walled up, and in total darkness.

"'Twere a wonder as you weren't choked," said John, as he listened to this story.

"We should ha' been wi'out a doubt, but as it happens, we began some years back to bore for a shaft into this part o' pit, but then 'twere found as t' groond warn't firm, and naught was finished, but the bore just gev us a breath o' air. But there's one meet inside as oi'm afeard is mortal hurt; the blast hev fallen on he, and oi can't roightly see who it be; we must dig un' out gently, and mak' the opening a bit bigger to carry un' through."

Some of the men returned inside with a lantern and spades, whilst others set to work to make the opening wide enough for their injured comrade to be carried through. Mathew had passed inside with the farmer, and stood by, as the men cautiously removed the lumps of crystal from the body lying there bleeding and senseless. It was Mathew's ally, Joe Pegler. The left side of his head was laid open from crown to ear, and the left side of the body from head to foot severely lacerated.

Such rude help as could be given there in the chill, damp pit, with no bandages, no proper restoratives, or means of comfortable conveyance, was given promptly, the miners losing their roughness in their efforts to bring the wounded lad easily to the pit's mouth. Mathew, himself, bound his head, the men tearing their canvas jackets with reckless generosity to furnish bandages ; and having done that, they joined hands beneath him, and carried him gently to the wooden bucket, which was the only means of communicating with the upper world. Mathew and two others got in with him, and held him up between them, and the signal was given to haul up slowly. Midway between the pit and the yard they could hear a clamour of voices, to which a dead silence succeeded when the bucket was drawn nearer to the surface, and the three men could be seen supporting a motionless and bandaged figure between them.

"Who's yon?" was asked in hoarse whispers, and one of the men replied, "'Tis Joe Pegler.

"Be thur eny more hurt?" was the next anxious question ; and a smothered cry of relief was heard as the answer went up in the negative.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED.

“**W**HEER be Bet?” went from mouth to mouth amongst the crowd around the opening; but there was no Bet there, and they were strange hands that lifted the wounded miner from the bucket. It was tenderly done though, and Mathew scarcely believed that the softened voices and looks and gestures of sympathy came from the men and women who had lately tried to take his life. A stretcher that had not been used for years was brought from the foreman’s office in the yard, and on it Joe Pegler, still unconscious, and scarcely breathing, was laid, and fastened. A score of strong fellows wrangled for the privilege of carrying their mate home, and when the question of priority had been settled, and the stretcher was taken up, the rest fell back, and a move was made towards the village.

The absence of Joe's mother—the only woman almost from the salt-workers' quarter who was not in the crowd—was talked about in angry tones ; and some said they knew well where Bet was, and why she was not there. Indeed, there could be no great mystery as to the whereabouts of Mrs. Pegler, for at that hour of the evening she was generally dead drunk, either in her own kitchen or at the public-house.

A long, irregular procession, headed by the bearers of the stretcher, wound its way through the yard, over the bridge, and through the dark and tortuous lane that led to the village. Progress was slow, but the lights of Lintorn came in sight at length ; and presently the stretcher, with its silent and ghastly burden, was laid at the door of the Peglers' cottage. The bearers knocked, but there was no answer, and they opened the door, and carried the stretcher into a bare and dirty kitchen, where a handful of burnt cinders just glimmered in the grate, and the keen wind of an October night whistled through the broken window. They unbound and lifted Joe from the stretcher, and carried him into a room beyond, where was a ragged and broken substitute for a

bed. There they placed him, and all this while his mother had not come.

Mathew was at the bedside, unbinding and refastening the bandages on the lad's head, when he heard a heavy staggering step behind him, and turning round, saw Bet Pegler at the door. Three minutes before she had been senselessly drunk; but when they told her at the public-house that her lad—whom she loved and abused vehemently—had been carried home on a stretcher, she roused herself, and rushed in a horrid fear to the house.

Sodden with beer, her dull mind scarcely yet awake to the situation, she stood at the door, and looked with staring eyes at the still figure on the bed. In her face the pallor of fear struggled with the flush of drunkenness, and the result was a mixture of white and purple, horrible to see.

Bet Pegler was little given either to weeping or whimpering, and there was no moisture in her eyes as they wandered from the bandage around the head, through which the blood oozed steadily, to the foot from which the boot had been torn; but the muscles of her face worked convulsively, and she asked in a hoarse whisper,—

"Be the lad dead?"

"No," answered Mathew, "and by God's help he will not die. Send the people away outside, and shut the door. Come you, then, and help me."

Bet expected to be stormed at for her drunkenness, but at that moment Mathew was thinking more of the wounded lad than of his tipsy mother; and besides, he wanted her help.

Many a night's soaking in the beer-house had hardened Bet, so that she was able with an effort to throw off the worst effects of her potations; and passion for her son, and the fear that he might die, came to her help, and by-and-by she was as sober as Mathew.

The nearest doctor was more than five miles away, so through the whole of that night Mathew had to rely on his own medical knowledge, which was limited in the extreme.

After midnight the fever came on, and the lad tossed and raved on his miserable bed. The superstitious terrors of his mother—who interpreted his incoherent words as reproaches sent direct from Heaven upon herself—provided another difficulty for Mathew to contend with.

But all the brutality of the woman went from her, and Mathew had but to motion with his finger, and she obeyed him. Her face never lost its look of fear, and whenever shé was not fetching something, or aiding, under Mathew's word, to shift the lad on his bed, or readjust a bandage, she went and stood close beside him, bending down to note the coming and going of the colour in his cheek, and movements of his lips, and muttering to herself that her lad would die, that God was going to kill him because his mother was bad, and drank away his earnings.

A queer group they were when the dawning day looked in upon the wretched room—the clergyman with the black hair shading his pale face which the troubles of the night had made paler, the debauched mother cowed and quiet, and the miner upon the bed, whose ceaseless motions kept the watchers ever vigilant. When the light came, Betty, who had the true barbaric notion of a vengeful God that needed to be appeased, insisted that Mathew should pray for her son and herself, and knelt beside him while he besought the mercy of Heaven for the sickness of the son and the sins of the mother. This comforted her, and she sat

quiet by the bedside until the sun rose, and she went to answer the neighbours who came with inquiries for Joe.

Betty, in a whisper, summarised the history of the night, to the effect that "Joe had looked red i' the feece, an' screeched ; an' she had twice seen divil come in at windoo an' holler for him ; an' parson preed, an' froightened un awee."

Offers of help were not wanting ; and one had brought a worn-out air pillow, which having been slept on by a patient who had recovered of typhoid fever, was believed in the village to possess healing powers applicable to most of the ills that flesh was heir to. Another expressed his sympathies in a still more practical way by running the five miles that separated the village from the nearest doctor.

The doctor came, and shook his head, and prescribed treatments that were next to impossible ; but said the case was not hopeless.

When the evening drew on, Mathew, whose vigil of the previous night had been told all over the village by Betty, returned to the cottage, and took up his post as before, with the woman for nurse.

That night was worse than the first, and when the day began to break, the patient seemed as though he would not live to see it.

"Vicur," asked Betty, with a mixture of awe and entreaty, when the lamp of life in Joe had sunk to the merest flicker, "if the lad doied, and was took, could yew fetch him back?"

"No," answered Mathew; "there is no man could do that."

"Vicur, if the lad doied, and was took, could God A'moighty fetch him back?"

"Surely," replied Mathew, "if it pleased Him."

"Vicur," went on Betty, "yew be a man o' God, an' oughter know summut o' the wees o' God; is it yewr thinkin' as God A'moighty would teek the lad fur the badness o' his muther?"

The words, "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children," came into Mathew's mind, and he was on the point of saying them; but he remembered that to the poor leaden-witted mother they would sound like the death-knell of her son, and forebore.

"I do not think," he said, "that God means to take your son; I think that He will spare him to you."

"Oi bless yew fur that, vicur. 'Twould be a ter'ble thing fur me if Joe were took. He be the best lad i' Lintorn, thoo he hev me fur muther."

There was some truth in this, for Joe Pegler was one of the few youths of his own age in the salt-workers' quarter who had not drowned his earnings in beer; and Mathew had noticed him from the first as one who was inclined to stand on his side.

His own desire for Joe's recovery was scarcely less strong than the mother's; and he, too, watched anxiously the changes which every hour brought. In the brief pauses between the services that one or other of them had to render continually to the patient, Mathew gave himself to comforting the mother.

Bet was afraid of him always; quite unable to understand one who acted invariably on the principle of the soft answer that turneth away wrath. She knew well that if there were any of her neighbours with whom she had dealt as she had always dealt by Mathew, not even the dire sickness of herself or her son would have drawn forth such unstinted aid as Mathew—who had every reason to detest her

—had given from the first moment of her trouble; and she could not understand it in the least.

Her doubts made her suspicious, and at first she responded only in a clumsy, embarrassed way to Mathew's kindness. But when she could not help seeing their genuineness she gave way, and listened attentively and even curiously while he talked with her.

Mathew out of his deep and intimate knowledge of the Bible drew many things that bore upon the case of the sick lad and the widow mother,—things new and strange to Bet, but brought by Mathew within the range of her small understanding; and her strong, coarse features brightened, and became as nearly soft as possible, when he told her how Christ had once stopped a funeral procession, and touched the bier, and called back to life the only son of the mother who was a widow; and how again he had raised a young girl who slept the sleep of death; and again how His minister and prophet Elijah had restored to life and to his mother's arms the child of the woman that had befriended him.

These were revelations to Bet Pegler; she had heard nothing of these things before; and Mathew

saw that she realised them only in a vague and hesitating way.

She was full of superstition ; but even this was a help to Mathew ; for when he talked so intimately of God and Jesus, the thought came into her mind that here was one who was directly sent from God ; and thinking that, she felt that if she did not listen to him she would be punished by the death of her son.

It was a strange, almost a heathen spirit in which to begin to receive the message of the Gospel ; but Mathew was grateful for any channel through which his words might find entrance to the dark and sin-bound soul of the woman.

And when again the earliest light broke into the narrow chamber, and Mathew, bending over Joe, called Betty to see that the fever had abated, she believed that God had interfered directly to save her son, and called once more on Mathew to give thanks to Him for her.

Days went by, and Joe Pegler mended, slowly, but surely, and was lifted from bed, and placed in John Dorlcote's chair which Mathew had carried from his cottage, and placed by the side of a fire which Mathew's purse had provided.

In the village, they said that the profits of the beer-house had largely diminished within the past fortnight; and when Bet Pegler was asked if she could give any explanation of this unusual circumstance, she was not backward with an answer. It was one of her virtues—which certainly did not in all things shine so prominently—that she seldom did things by halves. In her drinking days, she drank harder and more recklessly than any of her boon companions; and now, in the new phase on which she announced her intention to enter, she would not bestow so much as a look upon the sign of the *Jacob's Well*.

CHAPTER XIV.

PARLEY WITH THE REBELS.

ONE good result accrued to Mathew from the illness of Joe Pegler. It brought him a staunch and stout champion in the person of Joe Pegler's mother. When Joe was well, and Betty had resumed her gossiping functions in the village,—though from that time she gossiped sober instead of drunk,—she laid down with emphasis the particular proposition that “Parson was a good man;” and backed it up by a general declaration of her willingness to “whop the gal as said he wasn't.” Having made her position clear, Betty dared any one to oust her from it; but the challenge was superfluous, for there was no woman, and there were not many men, in the village who cared to enter the lists with Mrs. Pegler.

Mathew was at pains to express his appreciation of her championship, and at greater pains to explain that he would prefer it to be of a some-

what less aggressive character. But his arguments on this point were for the most part thrown away on Betty, who set small value on friendship that was not prepared to display itself in a use of fists.

She went about the village in her own way, endeavouring to make friends for Mathew, and had a strong argument in the cure which she avowed that he had wrought upon Joe. The story of the devil, his visit to the sick-room, and his discomfiture by Mathew, was embellished by her until no mediæval monkish legend surpassed it in size or wonder. It was the very story to take hold on the imagination of the village; it became popular, and it did more to increase the influence of Mathew than the whole stock of his good deeds, his generosity, his charity, his religion.

It was in vain that Mathew reproved Mrs. Pegler for circulating so monstrous a myth; it was in vain that he denied all connection with it; the salt-workers were firmly persuaded that he had routed the devil in person; and no appeal to common sense or Holy Writ availed to dislodge the belief from their minds.

In fact, no sooner did they accept the story, than the vicar began to rise in their estimation.

They looked upon him with a kind of reverent awe, and talked of him no more with contempt.

It was Betty Pegler who originated the notion of a meeting between Mathew and the men, at Mathew's own house, with a view to the finding of some common ground on which they might discuss matters together. Mathew took to it with avidity, as he received any proposal that had the object of drawing him closer to the people.

Betty broached the matter to a group of men who gossiped in the street, with their cans on their shoulders, before they went down to the Works for the night.

"Wut be 'freed on, yew chaps?" she asked, with a tinge of contempt which was calculated to raise their spirit.

"'Teen't as thoo we was afreed," said Sandy, cautiously. "Thur beent none on us as is afreed o' parson; fur we hev tackled un afore, an' if need be, oi doon't doot but we could tackle un agin."

"Yew'er good uns at tacklin'," said Betty, who was weak in argument, because she could never resist the temptation of provoking her adversary; "Yew'er good uns at tacklin', when thur be tew

hundred on ye tew one ; but woi wunt ye goo an' tauk friendly wi' man in 's own house ? ”

“Mebbe,” suggested the young man Freddy, “parson would reese some little divils, and put un on fur tackle us.”

“Thur be a deal o' sense i' that, Freddy,” answered Sandy.

“Thur be a deal o' nonsense,” asseverated Mrs. Pegler ; “wut be parson tew reese divils fur ? He'll droive un awee, but he'll not fetch un ; an' oi'm thinkin' since parson druv awee yon big divil wut come fur teek Joe, thur beent noo divils would come anear parson agin.”

“'Teent divils neithur,” said Job Coiting, “thoo divils is aukwurd things ; but it been't a easy marter fur goo and tauk wi' parson i' parson's hoose, which we hev a'moost pulled doon.”

“Look here,” said Betty, “goo up, an' tell parson as yew should loike fur meek good th' damage wut yew hev done tew house.”

“Tew be suer,” answered Sandy, “we can offur repleece windurs.”

“An' that,” added Job, “'ll meek things street fur commence wi'. We doon't pledge tew nothin' consarnin' choorch nor pooblic ; all we says is, says

we, 'We hev brook door and windurs, and we would loike fur meek 'em good."

It was agreed, therefore, that if the vicar would receive them, the men would wait upon him.

Mathew's willingness to receive them might, if they had known him better, have been taken for granted; but Betty was made to act as a go-between, and through her the preliminaries were settled, and the meeting arranged.

At first the salt-workers thought of going in a body; but a second procession might, they thought, awaken in the vicar's mind disagreeable recollections of the first, and eventually it was decided that a deputation of half-a-dozen should proceed to Bluebell Cottage.

When it came to volunteering for this duty the men hung back, not from unkindness, but from shamefacedness; for by this time they were convinced that the riot had been a bad business so far as they were concerned, and the awkwardness of the first meeting impressed them keenly.

However, half-a-dozen were found equal to the task of apologizing for themselves and their friends; and on the appointed day they went to present themselves before the vicar.

They made a valiant walk of it until they came in sight of the cottage, and then their pace slackened, and Sandy, who had been stumping in the front with much show of bravery, fell to the rear.

There was no one who would be the first to enter, but Mathew saved them from this dilemma by going to the door and welcoming them in a body. When they were inside they stood together in a heap, and fell to ocular and silent exploration of the floor and the ceiling. With difficulty Mathew persuaded them to sit, and then was sorry he had done so, for their discomfort appeared to be greater in the sitting than in the standing posture.

Mathew, on his part, was a little puzzled how to open a conversation, but made a beginning by saying that he was very glad to see them.

As the remark was not addressed to anybody in particular, the men looked at one another to know who should reply to it; but whenever one man caught the eye of another, he made a diligent effort to look in an opposite direction, and the observation went unanswered.

"I wonder if they could talk about salt," said Mathew to himself, and hazarded another

general observation in reference to the salt manufacture.

Sandy cleared his throat, and seemed to be on the verge of a reply, but at the same moment Job Coiting put up his hand and sneezed violently; and Sandy, baulked of his speech, delivered a stealthy kick at Job, and made no further effort to break his silence.

There was another pause, and Mathew began to fear that the conference would be a speechless one.

Suddenly the young man Freddy opened his mouth, and addressing Joe Pegler, who was one of the deputation, said,—

“Speak up, Joe Pegler, and tell parson as youer greetful fur hevin’ keward yew.”

“An’ loikewise, Joe Pegler,” added Sandy, “speek up an’ tell vicur as we’er prepeered fur meek good all damige done.”

“Yew’er a good lad, Joe Pegler,” said Job Coiting, encouragingly, “an’ yew got a wunnerful deal o’ broosin’ unner that rock. Speak up, an’ tell parson as yew’er aweer it was him wut set yew up agin.”

Saddled with the double duty of returning thanks for his own cure, and apologising for the

mischievous done by the rioters,—in which, by the way, he had had no part,—Joe looked appealingly to the vicar, and said nothing.

Mathew came to his assistance. "Joe knows," he said, "how glad I am to see him well again; but he knows, too, that I had only a small hand in his cure. As for the windows, do not let us say anything of them. They were broken, they are mended. You are sorry, and I am content."

Sandy insisted that his mates and himself were very anxious to pay for the damage done, and that a subscription for that purpose had already been opened amongst them. Mathew declared, laughing, that he would not accept a farthing for himself, but would be glad to receive any money that had been collected as a beginning towards the expenses of a club he was trying to start in the interests of the salt-workers, and it was agreed that the money should go for that object.

The young man Freddy turned to Joe again, and said, "Yewer mother hev embreeced soobroiety in an astonishin' wee, Joe Pegler, since yew was broosed wi' yon rock."

Joe admitted that his illness had brought good to his mother, and said he was glad of it.

"Yewer mother hev drunk a wunnerful deal o' strong eele in her dee, Joe Pegler," said Job, and as this was a fact that could not be contradicted, Joe made no answer.

"But she been't drinkin' noo strong eele now, Joe," said Job, in a patronising way.

"Nor noo sort o' eele at all," said Sandy. "It gits ower me completely how yewr muthur hev kep' awee from mugs——"

"An' jugs," added the young man Freddy. "It do be said, vicur, that bisness hev fallen quoitte awee from pooblic since Joe Pegler wur broosed w' rock."

"Loikewise," said Job, "yewr muthur, Joe, hev not lammred eny gal since yew was broosed."

"It's a trew fact," said Sandy; "the slackness i' black oies is a thing comfurtable tew see."

"Yewr muthur hev an oncommon greet strong arm, Joe Pegler, tew be suer," said Job, "an' it be a thing fur rejoice at that she hev ceased tew fling it about as she wur used."

Poor Joe betrayed an evident discomfort at the turn the conversation had taken; but the men, who were willing enough to discuss a subject they were familiar with, would have held it to that point

for any length of time, had not Mathew made an effort to divert the talk into another channel.

He said he hoped that now the men had come to see him in his own house there would be great friendliness between them in the future.

Sandy replied to the effect that the vicar had done a good thing by one of the mates, and they were not insensible of this kindness.

"That is very good of you," said Mathew; "and now, if you feel in any way kindly disposed towards me, will you not show it by coming to meet me in church to-morrow?"

This was straight to the point, but Mathew had an end to gain in this interview, and he did not mean to lose sight of it.

At first there was no answer; the men looked sheepishly at one another, and the old restraint seemed about to settle on them again.

Then Joe Pegler spoke out, and said the mates ought to go to church.

"Here is one to lead you," said Mathew, pointing to Joe with a smile of gratitude; "you're not ashamed to follow your youngest mate, are you?"

The young man Freddy said that if Joe would go in first, he didn't mind if he "follered" him.

Sandy, with much magnanimity, added that considering the vicar's goodness to Joe when he was "broosed wi' rock," he thought the mates should, "as it were, giv' him anuther chance."

"But, vicar," said he, "fetch the sarmin doon so as we can unnerstan' hur. Put it fren'ly, an' familioos. Thur was, fur instance, Mary Ander's littil beebe wut doied to-morrer's a week, oi'm told yew said a good thing about it i' sarmin, an' Mary she wur wunnerful glad. Noo thur be Sarah Birdie wut hev just giv' burth tew twins; if so be as yew could wurk them twins in along o' sarmin 't would giv' oncommon pleasur' tew Sarah."

"Tremenjus greet stout beebes them twins be," said Job; "an' 'twould surely be a huge big comfort tew muthur on 'em, if so be as yew could speak on 'em from poolpit."

"An' if twins could set i' theer creedle unner poolpit whoiles sarmin was a-preachin', 'twould bring many fokes," said the young man Freddy.

"Loikewise, vicur," began Sandy again, "it should be well if yew would meek sarmin perticklur strong i' parts wut deals wi' brimstun. We can stan' a powerful deal o' brimstun, vicur."

"Trewth be, vicur," said Job, "we can't hev tew much on it. Thur's some on us wut is that bad, as we needs tew smell it afore we can be brought i' the roight wee."

It had been Mathew's policy to keep the brimstone out of sight as much as possible in his preaching; and this request from the men themselves surprised him not a little.

He began to tell them that true religion had very little to do with brimstone, and that he did not want to make them good men by frightening them about hell-fire; but very soon he found that he was getting beyond them, and that, as yet, he could not hope to bring these men to an appreciation of Heaven until he had first inspired them with a wholesome fear of hell. So he led them again to talk of simple things, and was sufficiently rewarded when he had obtained their promise to go to church once more.

The men were much taken with some sketches that lay upon the table—outline plans of a new kind of cottages for the poor, and would have Mathew give an explanation of them.

Mathew had, in fact, put them there with a purpose; and interested his visitors in no small

measure by a simple explanation of some principles of domestic sanitation.

"What always puzzles me," he said, "is that you don't seem to care about living in comfortable houses. Now these houses that are planned here are not so very different from yours, and with ever so little care you might make and keep yours quite as pretty and wholesome. What man of you is there who wouldn't like to find his hearth swept, and his floor dusted, and his bits of furniture clean and bright when he came home tired from the Works, and wanting rest and comfort? If you could get your wives to use a little trouble in making things cheery at home, you'd find the "Jacob's Well" a very dull place indeed. I don't think you'd go there any more. And your wives, I'm sure, would be very glad to do this, if you would encourage them. But a wife gets tired of keeping her house tidy if her husband litters it, or won't stay in it when he comes home. Don't you think you are to blame in this?"

Sandy, answering for himself and the others, said it could not be denied that the houses were a bit dirty, and he didn't know but it might be pleasanter if they were clean. Several of them

indeed were inspired with a desire for sanitary reforms from that moment, and expressed a determination to put the vicar's notions into effect forthwith.

"But 'teen't ony that, vicur," pursued Sandy, the old formula recurring to his mind ; "weer chaps as is boi neetur droi. Neither can't we help it ; it's the sault as does it."

"There's much reason in that," replied Mathew ; "I should be as thirsty as you if I worked as you do, only I don't think I should take so much beer to slake my thirst."

A questioning look came over the faces of the men. Beer was to them the universal and Heaven-sent remedy for thirst. Being thirsty, they turned by instinct into the public-house, and were satisfied when they had drunk as much beer as they could hold. There might be other drinks in nature, but beer was, beyond doubt, the proper drink for a thirsty salt-worker.

"You see," went on Mathew, "you overdo this beer-drinking. You don't really satisfy your thirst, but you take a great deal more than is good for you, and then you are more thirsty than ever."

This was an aspect of the question which did

not seem to have suggested itself to them before ; and I am afraid that a few of them continued to be sceptical respecting the accuracy of the statement that a man could be made thirsty by drinking. Mathew tried to explain it scientifically, but did not succeed to his own or the men's satisfaction.

Joe Pegler, however, said he was quite sure the vicar was right ; and as Joe's opinions on things in general had risen in value since his accident and wonderful recovery, his decision on this point was considered to have weight ; and the men went so far as to allow that there might be consequences connected with beer-drinking which they had not previously understood.

"Suppose, then," went on Mathew, "we had some place in the village where other drinks than beer might be bought ; suppose, for instance, in this club that we are trying to set up we sold such things as good coffee and good tea, would you buy drinks of that kind ?"

"Oi can swill tea putty well at toimes," said the young man Freddy.

Job Coiting admitted that he had tasted tea on one or two occasions at home, but had not found

his stomach much disposed to it. Did not know, though, but that it might have been the fault of his missus in making it; was of opinion that women, in a géneral way, were not much good at boiling tea.

Coffee was an unknown substance; and a new drink was an interesting subject to the salt-workers. Upon the whole, they believed they would, "as it were, give a chance" to Mathew's beverages; they would do the square thing by them for a while, at any rate; and if the new liquors did not satisfy, the fault would be Mathew's and not theirs. Mathew thought these terms cheap, and a bargain was struck.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE GOSSIPS SAID.

IT had not escaped the notice of gossips in Lintorn that the vicar set much store upon his chief teacher in the Sunday School. All that Mathew did he did openly; if he spoke to Dorothy in the school or in the street he did it without effort at concealment; and when he went, as he often did, to the farmhouse above the Heron's Bridge, he went in the light of day. Nevertheless, idle tongues began to wag; and one day, as Dorothy went through the street, a child called after her from a group of youngsters, "Thur goos parson's sweetheart." Then the urchins laughed, and the cry was taken up.

Dorothy heard it, and it made her cheeks tingle. She went home in an agony of shame, and sat down and cried bitterly. She dried her eyes before her father came home; but all

the evening she was miserable, and old John noticing her silence asked what ailed her. She would not tell him, and the next day, when she wanted things from the village, she sent a farm boy, and kept at home.

For a week she shunned the village, and then remembering that the old bedridden women, whom she called her pensioners, would miss her, she told herself that she was selfish and foolish, and made up her mind to go. She waited, though, till the short day had closed, and twilight had begun to fall on the fields, and then took her way by a bypath, and gained the village unseen.

She paid some three or four visits amongst rheumatic dames of three-score years and ten, whom the sight of her soft face and the sound of her sweet voice gladdened; whose meagre larders she replenished with good things from her own; and was running home again, when she thought of one pensioner who had been neglected.

"Poor old Susan!" she said to herself; "I had almost forgotten her. Susan would never forgive me if she heard that I had seen the others and neglected her. I must give her five minutes."

Susan, who was an inveterate gossip, had the affairs of everyone in the village at her fingers' ends, and—to the discredit of the old lady be it said—was the chief depository of the tales, legends, and rumours of Lintorn and its people.

She received Dorothy open-armed, and with a face overflowing with curiosity.

"Wut be it that fokes is a-sayin', dearie?" were the first words she said.

Dorothy reddened, and answered, "What do you mean, Susan? how should I know what people say?"

"Well, fokes does tauk, dearie; tew be suer they didn't ought, but they will, an' yew can't help 'em. They do be taukin' as yew an' vicur there——"

"Susan, for shame! how dare you!"

"Thur, now, ony see the littil thing, how she do fleer up; an' stroikes at me as if 'twere me said it. 'T been't me, dearie."

"But you should not listen to such things; it is wicked and unkind of you, and much worse to repeat them to me. How can you hear such foolishness?"

"Fuleishness! Lor' bless yew, dearie, 't been't

so fuleish neithur. 'Tis nat'ral. Here be yew, an' thur be vicur ; noo, if so be as vicur and yew——"

"Hush, Susan, hush ! I will not hear you," said Dorothy, with as much of anger as her voice could contain, and then broke down, and flung herself on her knees beside Susan, and sobbed violently.

The old woman put her arms about the girl's neck, and drew the small fair head upon her shoulder.

"Wut do teek on i' this wee fur, dear heart ?" she said, tenderly.

"Because I am unhappy ; because I am very miserable," sobbed Dorothy.

"Art not onhappy 'cos vicur be fond o' thee, sweet ?"

"He is not ; you must not talk to me in that way," she said.

"Thew art onhappy 'cos thou think'st he been't fond o' thee, lass ?"

"Oh no, no ! What have I to do with him or he with me ? He is my clergyman, my teacher ; he does not think of me but as one of his people. Why do they say such things, Susan ?"

"Theey tauk o' wut they see. Theey doon't mean noo harm. Wut be wrong i' couplin' thoi

neeme wi' vicur's? Vicur be a good man, an' thee bee'st a good lass."

"It is wrong. What cause have they to do this? Mr. Girton thinks only of his work."

"A man canna wurk alwees, dearie. An' canna he hev one tew help him i' s' wurk? Oi seey agin, it be a nat'ral thing."

"Don't, Susan, please don't! you hurt me. You wrong our vicar, whose whole heart is in his work, and who has no thought and no desire apart from it. You wrong me, because you suggest that I have been bold and forward."

"Nay, thur be none on us thinks that, dearie. We know thee well, that thou'rt a good and seemly lass, and thur be none on us that does not wish thee happy."

"Then, if you wish that, do not ever speak of this again, or you will make me very unhappy."

Dorothy went home quickly through the dark, for the words that the thoughtless child had thrown at her still tingled in her ears, and she dreaded to hear them repeated.

From that time a change came over her; she lost her buoyancy of spirit, and fretted and moped at home. She went out rarely, and in the day-

time was never seen in the village. She scarcely knew, and had not the courage to ask herself, what it was that had come to her ; but she was filled with doubt, disquietude, and misgiving. Sensitive always, her sensitiveness now turned to a morbid shrinking from self. She thought that she must have done something wrong, but knew not what. Had she been forward in anything that people should use her name thus lightly ? No, surely not ; who could say that she had ? Yet Susan had said that people spoke of what they saw ; what, then, had they seen ? And then she thought of the whole brief past since Mathew Girton came to Lintorn ; and though all too ready to blame herself, could find nothing that seemed blameworthy. She traced the friendship between Mathew and herself back to its frank and pleasant opening, and could not think that she had at any time played in it an unwomanly part. And then a soft glow came over her, as she thought of the happiness that friendship had been to her, and remembered the new energies that had risen in her during those few months, and the fulness of life, both intellectual and religious, which she had known since Mathew first began to talk

with and to teach her. But surely in all this she had given no cause why cruel gossips should jest about her, or idly link her name with his. It was false, it was base; she had done no wrong; she had not deserved that they should point at her and put a slander on her. Still she wearied herself with reproaches, and said worse things against herself than others had said or thought.

Once, in the silence of her room, she caught herself, not saying, nor even whispering, nor barely thinking, but just dimly and softly musing, "What if there were some truth in it, only a hair's breadth of truth? What if Mathew indeed——"

Ah! heart that trembles, and cheek that pales and flushes, what signs are these?

Mathew was quick to perceive that Dorothy was no longer to him quite what she had been. He could not tell what it was; a something that would not be defined or explained seemed to have come between them. Had it been one of his people in the village who from friendliness had on a sudden changed to coldness, he would have spoken of it at once, have asked a reason, and done his best to smoothe the path again; but something held him back from speaking to Dorothy.

But what had set itself between them? Was the barrier of his making? No; for his heart towards her was as it had always been; there was no change in him; of that he was assured. As yet Mathew knew nothing of what gossips had said, and were saying; he had not heard those idle words that had worked the change in Dorothy. But one day, when he sat with Susan in her kitchen, he heard a little; and it moved him no less than it had moved Dorothy. The old woman was more prudent than her wont; she said nothing of Dorothy's tears, and not much of the rude talk of the village; but she said enough to open the eyes of Mathew.

"Fokes do tauk as yew hev a loikin' fur Muster Dorlcote's Dorothy up theer, vicur."

"Well, it is true, Susan," said Mathew, innocently. "I respect and like her much."

"Ah, but fokes do tauk as yew be oncommon fond o' Muster Dorlcote's Dorothy, vicur."

"How do you mean?" he said.

"That's wut fokes tauk, vicur; and pore lass hev heerd some littil raskil chillers callin' 'Parson's sweetheart' after hur."

She said no more; but it was enough. Her

words gave Mathew the key to his mystery. This, then, was the meaning of Dorothy's restraint—a restraint quite different from that which she had worn in the early days before their friendship began, which affected him the more when he contrasted it with the openness and warmth of her manner these three months past. It was Mathew's turn then for troubled thoughts, for reflection, and self-communing; and he grew the more unquiet when, as days went by, and Dorothy and he seemed to recede farther from one another, he could not resolve in himself how he should approach her. He ceased to go to the farm, and at church and in the school she avoided him. Thus in his leisure he was thrown upon himself again; and finding his leisure now less full of pleasure than it had been, he curtailed it, and lengthened his hours of labour in the parish. His work amongst the people was sweeter than it had ever been, for he felt that the kinder part of their natures was opening towards him, and he saw himself reaping some of the fruits of a bitter toil. Yet he could not hide from himself that the work had not quite the zest it had had before; he went to it in the morning with less eagerness, and returned

from it in the evening with more weariness than he had known in the early days. For this he reproached himself bitterly. Was he turning sluggard in his Master's service? Was he changing from the faithful into the slothful servant? Now that the path was a little smoother his footsteps were slower; he was falling back at the very moment when most he should be pressing forward. He goaded himself, but it availed nothing; and for a while he lay "in the dark chambers of dejection," fast bound and helpless. But there was no sluggishness in his nature, and he could not long remain inert. He broke the chains of his despondency, and went about the business of his ministry with a resolve that he would be untrue to himself no more. His zeal and his energy came back to him; he went out early and returned late, and took no rest. Still there was something wanting in him; some virtue had gone out of him. He missed the counsel that had strengthened him, the voice so full of hope that had encouraged him, the soft look from deep grey eyes that had brightened him. Mathew knew well how true and pure the friendship had been betwixt himself and Dorothy, and he asked himself what was

he and what was she that they should let an idle word divide them? Then one night he said, "I will go and see her to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI.

SICKNESS.

THE next morning, early, a child from the salt-workers' quarter knocked at Mathew's door, and said that her little sister was taken sick, and her mother wanted the vicar to see her. Mathew went at once, and was alarmed to find that the child had well-developed symptoms of small-pox. He sent at once for the doctor, who said that without doubt it was a bad case of small-pox. The house was an ill-kept place, a fit breeding-ground for disease of any kind, and the patient was a weakly girl, eight or nine years old, who had little force to fight against the malady. She sickened rapidly, and in two days was dead. A child in the next house was seized within twelve hours of the death of the first, and she also died.

Mathew, who knew something of the sanitary state of the village, had his fears thoroughly

roused, and made the doctor go with him from house to house to stir the inmates to a sense of their danger. The doctor, as he went from one house to another, shrugged his shoulders, and said to Mathew that the whole salt-workers' quarter was ripe for an epidemic. In the first place the houses had been badly built, and to the sins of the builder and the plumber had been added the carelessness of the inhabitants. All the time he had been there Mathew had tried hard to reform the houses of his parishioners ; but it was only very recently that his words had begun to take effect.

The weather was cold and healthy, and the keen bright air did its best to blow away the sickness. But another victim was taken, and another, and presently there were six or seven patients stricken down in various parts of the village.

Mathew put his own affairs aside, and thought only of the needs of the parish.

He procured a grant from a local sanitary board, and further monetary help from the owners of the Salt Works, and with the funds in hand had a temporary wooden hospital erected on an open piece of ground at the back of the village. Two

ambulances were sent from the nearest town, and in these the patients were carried from the houses to the wooden hospital.

The sickness confined itself to the salt-workers' quarter, leaving untouched the older portion of the village, where healthier habits prevailed. At first only the children were taken.

"It's a bad case with these," said the doctor to Mathew; "the poor mites are handicapped at the start. The germs of disease are in them already. You have some hard drinkers amongst your people, I fancy?"

It was too true, as Mathew could not but admit.

"To be sure," said the doctor; "I know it; and here are some of the fruits showing already in the second generation. The drunkard father and the drunkard mother have transmitted some of the poison to the children. Their poor little frail systems are tainted from birth; and look at these sick things now,—disease hovers in the air, and instead of repelling they attract it. It is lost labour with these; I know it."

"But let us do what we may, at any rate," said Mathew, in whom hope sprang persistent.

"To be sure," answered the doctor. "They shall not die for lack of our help."

It was on Tuesday that the disease broke out, and on the Sunday following—when four young children had died, and five lay then at death's door—Mathew offered up a prayer in church.

It was a moderate congregation; for since the meeting between Mathew and the men the number of church-goers had been rising steadily, and now the dread of the terrible disease drove others to seek some comfort from the minister's words.

Dorothy was there, with her father; and after service John stayed to talk with Mathew, but Dorothy went and stood in the porch to wait for him. Mathew felt a pang within him, but took no notice.

Outside the church the people congregated, with fear written on their faces, and talked in a frightened way about the plague that had burst on the village.

It was curious to notice how, in their distress, they clung to Mathew. They pressed on him when he came out of the church, and asked what he thought of their trouble, and whether he be-

lieved that God would answer the prayer that he had made for them.

Every here and there through the salt-workers' streets a red mark upon a door told that the sickness was within; and in other houses the drawn blinds, or a piece of crape or black cloth on houses where there were no blinds, told that there the disease had done its worst, and given the victim over to death.

Even on that day the ambulance was seen in the street, and stayed at two houses to receive patients swathed from head to foot in flannels, who were carried thence to the hospital.

As yet, none but children and young people had been smitten; but on Sunday evening the vicar was sent for to the foreman, Brodie, who, as his duty was, had gone the round of the Works in the afternoon, and while there had been seized with sickness, and carried home. A seven-year-old daughter of Brodie's had been one of the first to die, and her death had struck the foreman with a heavy sorrow. Since the Wednesday when she died he had gone about wearily, speaking no more than duty obliged; and when the sickness touched him he made no effort to wrestle with it.

Mathew found him stretched on his bed, with the loathsome stamp of the small-pox already set upon his features. Sandy, reckless of infection, had made his way into the room, and was seated by the bed.

"Wut, lad," he was saying, "doon't doi; keep oop a heart; theer be liquor i' the pot yit."

"Leave me be, Sandy," answered the foreman, huskily; "oi mun goo;" and then seeing the vicar he turned to him, "Oi mustn't be fetcht roond, parson; oi mun goo to the lass."

"Not yet," answered Mathew, kindly; "let no man be in a hurry to go until his work is done. The child waits, and will wait. You shall see her, but not until the time appointed."

"If it be not now, when shall it be?" asked the sick man.

"In the time of God," said Mathew; "which time none but God knoweth."

"Oi cannot live wi'out the lass; fetch hur back, or leave me goo to hur."

"It is hard, I know it," said Mathew, in a voice full of tenderness; "but it is the will of God, and to His will all of us must bow, for there is none can strive against it. The purposes of God are just,

too, though we cannot read them. Put faith in God, man, and He will give you strength and comfort."

But there was no power of faith in George Brodie yet, and he turned wearily from the vicar, and put his face to the wall, and would talk no more.

His was the worst case; and his mental state aggravated the sickness of his body, so that he was brought very near to death indeed.

One or two other men were stricken after Brodie, and then the sickness became general throughout the salt-workers' quarter, and the resources of the little hospital and its attendants were strained to the utmost.

Mathew worked not wisely, but too well. He knew no rest; he went from one bedside to another; and the night was to him as the day in his watchings.

Some of the sick would take their medicine from no hand but his; and strong and sick alike turned to him for counsel and for comfort. It was nervous rather than bodily strength that kept him up; but the superstitious people thought that he was charmed, because, though he breathed the pestilence

by day and night, it seemed not to come near him. And even though one were not superstitious in the least, he might have thought with reason that the angel of God kept watch by the clergyman, and spread his wing betwixt the pestilence and him, so free was he from sickness, even in its very midst.

When the disease had spread up and down the three narrow streets where the salt-workers lived, and there were few houses on one or other of whose inmates it had not laid a noisome finger, the people broke down under the double strain of fear and the sense of inability to cope with the horrible invader. They grew reckless; many turned to drink, and there were ghastly scenes in houses where a patient, sick almost to death, was terrified by the noise of drunken revels in a room adjoining. The people lost control of themselves, and would have gone from despair to riot but for the strong correcting will and word of Mathew. At the Salt Works, the absence of the foreman, and the lack of power in the man who took his place, led to disorganisation and slackness amongst the men. Some worked only half time; some stayed away altogether; the whole body of them was becoming demoralised.

Mathew saw an evil here that threatened to be worse almost than the small-pox; and having spoken to the people strongly in their own houses, and threatened an absolute stoppage of the sale of liquor in the village, he exhorted them, in strenuous words, from the pulpit, and bade them remember that it lay with themselves to increase or diminish their troubles an hundredfold. He urged the men to return to their work, and the women to keep to their houses; and appealed to them one and all to be brave and patient under a trial in which each must bear his part. His words went home, and the people began to return to their senses.

But the plague was not abated, and death succeeded death in the village.

CHAPTER XVII.

FRIENDS AGAIN.

WINTER drew on apace. A bitter but a purging wind swept through the poison-laden streets, and wrestled fiercely with the pestilence. The broken pavement and the black uneven road were muffled in snow, and snow nestled in the eaves of the houses, and made a soft mantle for the hedges, and hid the bareness of the trees.

The season was all in favour of the doctor and the nurses, who welcomed the rude approach of winter. The small-pox raged still, but with less virulence than at first. Some of its strength was spent, and the doctor felt that he had it well in hand.

It was pitiful, though, how the little population had been thinned. New-made graves jostled one another in the churchyard, and still the sexton delved, and the deep sad cadence of the passing bell smote on the winter's air.

George Brodie, the foreman, whose first prayer—the first that he had ever uttered—was a passionate demand for death, that he might go to the child who had been taken from him, recovered, and was brought back slowly and unwillingly to health.

On the day that he was pronounced out of danger, the sickness laid hold of Job Coiting, and mastered him in two days. On the thin line between life and death Job found the speech that had been denied him in health; and, just before he died, asked Mathew, who sat with him, what road he should take to Heaven. What little life was left in him kindled when Mathew, with one hand on his Bible and the other on the hand of the dying man, knelt beside him, and besought admission for him to the place of God. Job, with broken utterance, followed the words of Mathew, and fell back in death before the prayer was ended.

But amongst the many deathbeds that Mathew soothed in those dark days, the strangest was Bet Pegler's, the reclaimed drunkard. Between Bet and death there was a hard struggle; but the whole past—a couple of months excepted—was against her, and death won the game.

Mathew and her son sat with her through the

whole of one night, and in the early morning she rallied for a while. She made Mathew read to her some of the verses he had read when Joe lay where she was then ; and made Joe sit at the foot of the bed, so that she might see him to the last.

"It be more fit loike," she said, "fur me tew goo than fur the lad. Joe be a good lad, an' can do summut i' the wurld ; but thur be noo pleece fur me. Joe, lad, dost forgi' me ? Doon't tauk as thou hast nought tew forgi', fur thou knoost oi ha bin a bad muthur. Look tew the lad, vicur ; he wur alwees o' thoi soide. Read some more out o' Book, fur the loight be a-gooi' frum me, an' thou dost tauk as the Boible be the best lanturn fur fokes wut is bloind i' spirit."

She sank, but rallied again, and yet a third time, for life was tenacious, and grudged the tightening grip of death. Before the breath had quite left her Mathew bent over her, and asked her what faith she had, and whether she could see the light.

"Oi doon't knoo a deal aboot feeth, vicur," she answered faintly ; "but thur be a spark o' loight, an' mebbe it be just enough fur draw me tew the good pleece."

Then the grim Serjeant reached out his hand again, and she resisted him no more.

Going to a sick house the next afternoon, Mathew met Dorothy coming out of it. It was the first time they had met face to face since the time when there had been no bar between them, and a nervous flush spread over Dorothy's cheek. But the sight of her in such a situation overcame all restraint in Mathew, and his voice was full of concern as he said, "Why are you here? This place is thick with danger; the very air is charged with poison. This is wrong of you, Dorothy."

It was the first time he had called her by her name, and she had not thought it could sound so sweet. She said,—

"I did not think of the danger; is it so great? I wanted to be of use; and the child in here is one of my little nursery children."

"The danger is greater than you know. Indeed, you have done wrong in coming. I know the charity of your heart, Dorothy, but you have done imprudently in this."

"Is it a time for prudence?"

"For some of us, no," he said, "but for you, yes."

"And why for me more than for others?" she asked, with gentle wilfulness.

"Does your father know that you are here?" asked Mathew in return.

"No," she said.

"Think of him, then," answered Mathew, "and ask yourself again if you have no cause for prudence."

"But you," she said, timidly, "you are here always, and if there is danger for me, there is danger also for you."

"No," he replied, "there is no danger for me where duty is."

She did not answer, and there was silence between them for a moment.

Then Mathew said again, "You will go home, will you not, and come here no more till the danger is past?"

"But it is hard to stay at home at such a time as this."

"Ay, but believe me," he said, earnestly, "the greater kindness in your case is to do the thing that seems the hardest. Indeed, indeed, you must not come here again; it is worse than wrong, and I must not let you do it. See," he added, with a

sad smile, "I am the vicar, and I forbid you the village until the pestilence is gone."

Then, when he saw that she still hesitated, he said again: "I pray you to go home, Dorothy; for your father's sake, and—for my sake."

"I will go," she said, and turned homewards. But she came back as Mathew opened the door of the cottage, and, without speaking, held out her hand to him. Mathew took it, and kept it an instant. They did not speak, but their eyes lifted, and they looked at one another, fearlessly and frankly as of old. Then Dorothy turned again, and went home, and Mathew lifted the latch, and went into the house.

Ah! if one had been there to note how lightly Dorothy went her homeward way, how boundingly she crossed the fields, hardly displacing the feathery snow, how merrily she threw open the door of that snuggest of kitchens, all bathed in the fire's ruddy glow, how, finding her father there, she took his big cheeks between her hands, and kissed them, and called him pretty childish names, how cheerily she answered the song of the steaming kettle, and with what a soft musical hum she went about to lay the table,—all that would have been pleasant to see and hear.

Mathew, too, when released from his post by the sick child's bed, went from the house towards his desolate cottage with a lightness of step he had not known for long. The snow had begun to fall, and the wind dashed it sharply into his face ; he felt it not : it soaked into his boots, but he scarcely knew that he had feet. His worn overcoat, which would have done a little to shield his chest had he buttoned it, flapped loosely in the wind. And so through the wintry street he went, heedless of the winter, his eyes downwards, his thoughts busy, and ran almost headlong into a labourer, whom he passed going in the same direction.

The man gave him cordial good-evening, and Mathew pulled up to answer him.

They were passing the churchyard, and the labourer jerked his finger towards where the snow had shrouded the fresh-turfed graves, and said,—

“ Sad toimes we hev bin a-passin' threw, vicur.”

“ Yes,” answered Mathew, “ ill-used Nature has been taking a terrible revenge upon us.”

“ Be it neetur wut hev fetched smorl-pocks ? ”

“ Well, yes, friend, in an indirect way. Nature's laws have been abused, and that is a sin against

her which she never overlooks. Nature says to us, 'You must do this, and this, if you would live in health.' If we outrage Nature by doing something directly opposite, she turns upon us, and such horrible results follow as we have seen here."

"Oi had bin a-thinkin', vicur, as it wur God A'mighty wur sort o' visitin' us fur summut we had done fur displease Un."

"I think we had better look for another cause. No need to upbraid God for the consequences of bad drains and dirt."

Hodge pondered for a moment this novel explanation of the small-pox, and then passing it by, said,—

"Thur be wun o' them old proverbs, vicur, wut says it be ill wind wut bloos noobody noo good, and this yer smorl-pocks hev done summut fur yew, oi be thinkin'."

"What has it done for me, friend?"

"It hev meede fur yew amongst them sault-wurkurs more frens 'n iver yew had afore."

"Well, well, we have helped one another; adversity has drawn us closer, and perhaps we have shown one another our better sides."

"Thur be a-meny good wurds put upo' yew,

vicur, it be a trew fact ; an' fokes says thur be a heap o' blarsfemin' fellers wut yew hev meede seents on."

"This I know," answered Mathew, "that the souls of some whose bodies lie beneath the snow there are safe in Paradise."

"It be a oncommon blessed thing fur them sools, vicur, an' no misteek. Lord send as we shall all on us journey that wee, w'en our dee do come."

"Amen to that," said Mathew, "with all my heart and soul."

It might have been the lightest summer breeze that played on Mathew, so little conscious was he of the elements outside him, as he mounted the hill to Bluebell Cottage. It was a very biting blast, though, and it would have been wise of him to fasten that well-worn overcoat about his throat. What a glow there must have been at his heart that he felt nothing of the icy tooth of winter ! The poor little cottage and the garden surrounding it had no charm against the pitiless wind, and pitilessly it dealt with them, nipping here, and striking there, and winning a cruel victory everywhere. Far away in the valley of the Were might be seen the red and twinkling eyes of the furnaces,

and from the chimneys the jealous smoke came out to spoil the glittering mantle of the snow.

It was a night as still, but for the wind, as that summer night when Mathew entered on his ministry at Lintorn, and his heart was as tumultuous now as then. But this was a happier tumult; he had conquered along a good part of line, and he hoped and believed that there were victories yet to come.

And Dorothy? Yes, there was another cause for joy; Dorothy and he were at one again. Mathew did not try to hide from himself that this was a main source of the pleasure that warmed him that evening; but his feelings, though strong and ardent, were confused and indefinite. He could not have explained before why the separation and brief coldness between them had given him so much pain, and now he did not know exactly why he felt so much pleasure at the reconciliation. He had hardly yet defined his feelings towards Dorothy. In the time of their friendship they seemed to be friends, and only friends; but was the momentary disruption of a mere friendship enough to occasion so keen a pang, and the fresh cementing of it to furnish so keen a pleasure?

Then he remembered the pleasant evenings in the farmhouse amongst the trees, and asked himself whether they might not now be renewed ?

It would have been well for him at this time to guard his own health, to take more rest and nourishment, for the labours in the hospital and amongst the patients in their homes were wearying, and the season was of unusual severity. But amongst the people there was no one to say to him, "You are overworking, you are putting too great a strain on nature, you are a man only, and not a very strong one ; rest, and it will be well for you." A nurse in the hospital had indeed urged him to use prudence for himself ; but he answered always that he was strong, and could take no harm so long as there was duty to be done. So he went on, and when he was relieved of the task of watching one evening, and should have stayed at home quietly, he bethought him of John Dorlcote's kitchen, in which he had not sat for many a night, and got out his lantern, and took his way through the fields.

It was a night only for strong men, or men who were out with a purpose ; weak things were best indoors. A night of frost and wind, the wind

tearing noisily over the land, and calling to you to come and wrestle with him, and battering the trees over your head to show you what big things he could do. Inanimate nature gave in to him meekly and without a struggle, the trees cowering together, and submitting to be buffeted all ways at once, the sedges by the river bending flat, and the water letting itself be lashed into waves. In the sky's black dome the moon glittered, and made for herself a shining path along the river. Her white beams fell upon field and fence and hedge, making the snow whiter, and giving to the leafless trees a weird, fantastic form. Secure in well-strawed sheds, the cows bellowed at the wind, and from the depth of his kennel the watch-dog bayed at the moon. The stone parapets of the Heron's Bridge were crusted with icicles, and the trodden and frozen snow gave a treacherous coating to the path that led to the house. But bright the fire gleamed behind the lattice, and when the farmer, hearing Mathew's step upon the path, flung open the door, the light streamed out over the snow, and made the cold moon colder.

Big John clapped Mathew in a kindly way upon the shoulder, and bade him welcome.

"I thought thou hadst a'most forgot us, vicar; I did so; and Dorothy here——"

"*I* did not think so, father dear," interrupted the maiden.

"Did I say thou didst, lass?" said her father, pinching her tender cheek. "What I were about to say, vicar," he continued, "was that Dorothy here have missed thee,—well, now thou hast, thou know'st it; and do not deny."

"Of course, father, we have both missed Mr. Girton; but we know what sad cause has kept him in the village these weeks past."

"'Tis true; a sad cause indeed," said John. "How goes it with them poor folks, vicar?"

"Well, by the grace of God, and the skill of the doctor and the goodness of the nurses——"

"And of thyself, vicar, if thou wouldst speak the whole truth," interpolated the farmer.

"Well, by all our help, if you will have it, John," smiled Mathew, "we have, I trust, put the worst days behind us. We have had no fresh cases for a week; and those that are down now will, all of them, I hope, be up again before many days are gone."

"Thank God for it, then!" said John, with a big earnest sigh, and Dorothy echoed him.

"It has been a terrible time for you," Dorothy said to Mathew presently.

"It has been a terrible, and yet in some respects a noble time," he answered, taking his accustomed place on the settle, while the farmer changed his weekday for his Sunday coat, and Dorothy provoked the pine-logs into a brighter glow.

"It has been terrible to me to sit by and watch the deaths of men and women and children which I was powerless to prevent, and to see the grief of bereaved ones which I could only partially console ; but the patience of some, and the heroism and fortitude of others, have been noble sights indeed."

"You have been drawn very close to the people since the sickness came?" said Dorothy, inquiringly.

"Yes, and I have learned more of them than I have ever known before. I often think now that I judged them too hardly before. They have taught me some lessons of real goodness which I have been glad to learn."

"They, too, have learned of you," said Dorothy.

"Well, well, perhaps," said Mathew. "I have spared nothing, but I have had some reward."

"Truth is, vicar," put in John, emphatically,

"this small-pox here has bin the peace-maker a-twixt you."

"A very sore and grievous peace-maker," answered Mathew, sadly. "I would to Heaven there had been some other way of learning to know and esteem one another. But the methods of God are inscrutable; and the agents by which He does His work are strange, and sometimes, as in this case, dreadful."

"It is very strange indeed," said Dorothy, "that you, who have trodden such peaceful lines amongst these people, should have had your way towards their sympathies smoothed by riots and accidents and sicknesses. The men were shamed first by their attack on your cottage; then the accident to poor Joe Pegler was turned to your account; and now this terrible sickness has worked good for you also."

"Yes," said Mathew, "it seems indeed as though the tendency of all these things has been the same; but it seems also that God has chosen a somewhat bitter plan of working for me."

"Be thankful if the end draws in sight, vicar," said John; "for, as you ha' said, the method o' God is outside o' our understandin'."

"Oh! I do not see the end yet, John," replied Mathew; "but," he added with energy, "I see the path more clearly before me, and if the light do not fail, the goal shall be reached in time."

"Is there still danger in the village?" asked Dorothy of Mathew, with a wistful and a pleading look.

"Yes, Dorothy," answered he in a tone of decision, "much danger. Ah! I know your purpose," he added kindly, "but it must not be. You know the command I laid upon you? I do not mean to take it off these many days to come. You are banished absolutely from the village for another six weeks."

"So long? Ah, that is tyrannical; you use your power unfairly. In six weeks there will be nothing left for me to do."

"Oh yes, indeed there will. I shall have convalescents by that time, who will welcome your presence as an angel's."

"What's this? What be the lass about?" said John.

"Oh! have you not heard of her project, farmer, and her scheme for playing the good angel amongst my sick? Why, one day I surprised her

in the very act of leaving an infected house, and but for my command, my positive command, she would have been at every sick bed in the village, healing the patients by her very look and voice ; but, I fear, taking their sickness to herself."

"Thou hast said nought o' this to me, girl," said the old man, reproachfully.

"No, father dear," she answered, timidly ; "you would have been afraid for me, and have scolded me."

"That I would, both," he said. "It was wrong o' thee, though I know thou didst mean it kindly. I be main glad the vicar found thee, and sent thee home. O God o' heaven," said the old man fearfully, speaking half to himself, and half to Dorothy, "if harm should come a-nigh thee, what would thy father do?"

"Father, dear father," she said, going to his side, and winding her arms about his neck, "do not talk so ; what harm has come to me?"

"None, lass, I thank the Lord ; but it might ha' done. Promise me thou'lt keep out o' danger's way : remember that I have none but thee ; thou'rt the sun o' my life, sweetheart."

"I promise it, dear father, I promise it," she

said softly, and kissed the old man's hands, and his ruddy cheek, just now a trifle pale and dewed with one big tear.

"But, Mr. Girton," she said again, turning to Mathew, "is there nothing I can do? My heart is very sore for all those suffering ones."

"Yes," he said, "you may help us greatly if you will. You carried a basket with you the day I met you; can I guess what was in it? I have heard of the cunning of your hand to tempt sick palates. We need such cunning badly. Would it content you a little to help us in that way?"

"Oh yes, indeed! I will do that gladly. I may do that, father, may I not?"

"Thou may'st truly, sweetheart. There's the whole larder there behind us, and underneath the larder's the cellar; empty both, if the sick folks want it."

"Thank you both," said Mathew. "And now, Dorothy, you may know that, though you do not stir a step from home, you can tend my poor patients in quite as practical a manner as if you were—where you would like to be—at their bedsides."

"Give me a list of all the nicest things you want," she said, "and I will take father at his word, and empty the larder and the cellar."

"But, vicar, dost take care o' thyself? Thou seem'st to me a bit paler than common. Is he not so, Dorothy?" said John.

Dorothy did not answer for a moment, her look was on the ground; but from beneath her eyelids she shot a quick and anxious look at Mathew, and the result of that momentary inspection did not seem to comfort her.

"Indeed, father," she said, "I am sure that Mr. Girton works too hard."

"There be much depends on thee and on thy health, our vicar," said Mathew. "Thou ow'st it to all on us, not less than to thyself, to use a deal o' care. Good heart! we must not ha' thee laid by along o' the rest."

"You are too careful for me, you kind ones," Mathew said. "But have no fear; while there is need of me, I shall be kept in health."

"Ah! but a man must look to himself, and not be ower rash," said John, with warning voice and look.

"Yes, father is right, Mr. Girton," spoke Dorothy. "Come, you know how strict you were

with me ; we shall be as strict with you, if you show us that you are neglecting yourself."

"Well, I will be careful," said Mathew: "yes, I will be most careful."

And then the farmer made his daughter fetch out the old leathern Bible, in which Mathew was always asked to read before he left ; and when a chapter had been read, Dorothy lighted the lantern, and her father went and fetched the threadbare overcoat from an inner kitchen.

Dorothy's fingers, at other times so nimble, found the lantern door hard to fasten ; and what should Mathew do but help them ?

Their eyes met again for an instant, and Mathew said, "You have kept your word well. You have done all that I asked."

"You did not ask," she replied ; and added, with a tender, timid smile, "you bade me."

"Is it hard to be bidden ?" asked Mathew.

She faltered a moment, and answered, "No—not always."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRICKEN.

THE wind leapt shrieking into the kitchen, as the farmer opened the door for Mathew.

"It be no night to send thee away," said he; "it be downright cruel of us to let thee go i' the teeth o' such a wind. Do now stay; there be room and to spare; and I ha' noticed a kind o' whiteness on ye this two hours."

Dorothy added her entreaties to her father's, and for a moment Mathew hesitated. Such a bitter night it was, and so bright the fire gleamed behind; and Mathew was tired, and would have liked to stay. But it was Saturday, and he remembered that he had the finishing touch to put to the morrow's sermon; so making the most of his meagre wrappages as a protection against the wind, he bade his friends good-night, with repeated thanks, and went out into the darkness.

The wind seemed glad to have Mathew for

his foe again, and sprang upon him with a roar. They struggled together up the hill from the bridge, the wind doing his best to force Mathew backwards into the river, and Mathew, with head bent and shoulders set, resisting all his efforts. Presently the path was bordered by a tall hedge, which broke the force of the wind ; but then the snow began to fall, and the snow and the wind leagued themselves together, and made the battle a hard one for Mathew. The farmer had plied him with good hot wine at starting, and while the strength of the wine lasted Mathew had a serviceable ally. But an open field was reached, where there was neither hedge nor tree ; and seeing this, the wind screamed again in fierce delight, and came on with new power. And now the snow fell thickly, in great blinding flakes, and Mathew felt it cold upon his face and wrists. Two broad fields, with not a leaf or twig of shelter, were crossed ; and then Mathew stayed and leaned exhausted against a fence, whose lower bars were muffled in two feet and a half of snow. The moon was hidden behind a black and sweltering mass of clouds, which swallowed also every vestige of a star ; Mathew's lantern was

out long ago, and the snow alone gave light. But the rays from the snow were blinding and not helpful ; and the path was scarce distinguishable amid that vast and glittering waste. Mathew knew that he was but half a mile from home, and he struck out again with faltering steps, but with a resolute will to stay no more until he crossed his own threshold. But it was the spirit only that was strong ; the flesh was very weak. His blood was chilled ; he could no more repel the cold, and he felt a growing numbness in his limbs. " My sermon, my sermon," he said, trying to spur himself on ; but his steps weakened every instant. At a distance of a quarter of a mile from home he stopped again, and doubted whether he could go any farther. He rested five minutes, and went forward another hundred yards ; then he came to a tree, and leaned against it heavily. The wind and the snow saw that the victory was theirs, but they had no mercy, and made cruel sport of their victim. Mathew's strength was ebbing fast, and there were three hundred yards still to be covered—a distance which might be said to have doubled itself by reason of the heavy snow and the driving wind.

Until now, Mathew had been overcome only by cold and fatigue; but within sight of home he felt a deadening languor steal over him, and a sense of pain and sickness in his head. Then a great fear took hold on him, for it flashed across him suddenly what his condition was. He had not sat by the beds of many small-pox patients without learning every stage of the disease, and his knowledge told him that these were the first symptoms. Labouring painfully, he crawled forward for another hundred yards, and then, in utter weariness, flung himself upon a bank, where he sank in eighteen inches of new-fallen snow. He lay there for ten minutes, which seemed as many hours, for all the while he was using the whole force of his will to combat the two deadly influences of sickness and that absolute exhaustion of body which urged him to lie and sleep amidst the snow. Then he roused himself, and staggered to his feet, and went on again, blindly and with reeling steps. So he continued, until he came within fifty yards of his cottage, and could see the lamp burning in the window. He made another strong effort, but fell forward senseless upon the snow. The wind swept over him with

an exulting cry, and the ice-cold flakes began to cover him thickly. But it was a swoon and not sleep that had taken him; and presently his senses returned, and he lifted himself to a kneeling posture. His limbs felt shrunken and warped, as though some subtle torture had been applied to them; he was cold to the heart, and the veins in his forehead seemed to be knotted up with pain. Creeping and shuffling, rather than walking, he reached the door, and raising himself with his hands pressed close against the lintel, got to the latch, and lifted it, and let himself in. He crept to the bed, and fell upon it, his limbs all huddled together.

CHAPTER XIX.

FROM THE GATES OF DEATH.

THE next day was Sunday. As far as the horizon's line, the land was wrapped in a gleaming coverlet of snow; but the winds were all up-gathered, and the clouds had vanished; the sun shone high, and his morning beams were glorious. The hours wore on, from nine to ten, and half-past ten, and then the bell swung out from the tower, and by two's and three's the people took their way through the snow to church. It was such a congregation as had cheered the heart of Mathew for a few Sundays past; not an overflowing one by any means, but numerous enough to warm the soul of a preacher accustomed to talk to barren benches.

Mathew's habit was to be in the vestry a quarter of an hour before service, and the people knowing it, stood about the porch before they went in, waiting to see and greet him. But the minutes

went by, and the last bell began, and he did not come, and they passed in and took their places.

John, and Dorothy his daughter, had a heavy walk through the snow, and were later than usual; and when they arrived, John went round to the vestry to see how it had fared with Mathew the previous evening. He found the old verger there, waiting with the surplice in one hand, and a vast silver watch in the other, and looking from the surplice to the watch, and from the watch again to the surplice, with a face of much perplexity.

"Wheer be vicur, Muster Dorlcote?" asked the verger, when he saw John.

"An't he here?" said John.

"Mebbe," answered the verger with dignity, "but oi cannot see un; an' wut's more," he added, "their an't none on us seen him tew-dee."

"He was wi' me last night," said John, "an' I coaxed him, and my Dorothy she coaxed him, to put up wi' us till mornin'; but 'no,' says he, 'I ha' gotten my sarmon to finish,' and then he starts off i' the snow an' the wind, an' I an't seen un since. But we come this mornin' the road he must ha' gone last night, and no trace o' human thing did we set eye on."

"Yew didn't think fur call at 's hoose, Muster Dorlcote?" said the verger.

"We did think on't, surely," replied John; "but we was slow i' comin' through two feet an' more o' drift, and my Dorothy said that vicur be a'most always i' church fifteen minutes afore service commence."

"An soo he be moostly," said the verger, struggling to replace the watch in his pocket; "but it be tremenjus sartin he been't here tew-dee."

It was past the hour for service, though the bell had not ceased, and John, in his official capacity as churchwarden, began to be nervous.

A boy came in to fetch the books for the choir, and John bade him whisper his daughter to go to him in the vestry.

Dorothy came with an anxious face, and John explained to her the situation.

"But, father," she said, when she had heard his statement, "have you not sent to Mr. Girton's house? That should be done at once."

"Surely," said John, "that's the thing to do; I'll go mysel'."

"Father," whispered Dorothy, catching him by

the sleeve as he was going out at the door, "let me go with you."

"No, lass," answered John, decisively; for his mind turned at once to the possible cause of the vicar's absence, and he was resolved that Dorothy at least should be kept out of danger's way. He made haste to cover the quarter of a mile that lay between the church and Bluebell Cottage, and all this while the people remained in church, most of them anxious, all of them wondering; and each one to himself asking and answering the question, "What keeps vicar away?"

Dorothy stayed in the vestry, and as her eyes wandered over its scanty appointments, they fell upon the surplice, which the verger still held in readiness to robe the vicar, and noted a small hole in it; and Dorothy wished it had occurred to her to put a needle in her pocket before starting.

In about a quarter of an hour from the time that he left the vestry, the farmer's weighty step was heard coming quickly up the path from which the snow had been swept.

He entered the vestry with trouble and dismay in his face, and said abruptly—

"Put away yon white gownd ; there can't be no church here to-day."

"Oh, father ! what is it ? Is Mr. Girton ill ?" said Dorothy.

"He be ill as mortal man can be, child. It ha' taken hold on him sudden, an' 's wrestlin' wi' him strong."

It was an apt description. While John went in search of him, Mathew was lying delirious on his bed. The old decrepit woman, his house-keeper, found him at early morning, stretched in his clothes across the mattress ; and, paralysed with fear, she had done nothing but fling a blanket over him, and seat herself moaning at the bedside. Stupefied beyond all power of reasoning, she had neither sent to the hospital for help, nor to the church to warn the people ; and but for the arrival of the farmer it must have gone hard with Mathew. As John Dorlcote had said, the disease was even then wrestling with him strongly. It had not, indeed, taken him suddenly, for Mathew's neglect of himself had laid him open to a slow and stealthy attack ; and though he scarcely knew it, he had been sickening for days. And now, within ten hours of the time it had taken hold on him, he lay

powerless in the clutch of the disease, the poison of it stealing through and through him.

The doctor was brought to him without further delay; and, though he had seen the small-pox in its deadliest forms in the salt-workers' quarter, his face fell when he looked on Mathew.

"This will be the worst case," he said to himself. Then he decided that the patient should not be moved, and the little cramped cottage was forthwith transformed into a miniature hospital, and a nurse sent from the village. Admission was denied to all; and, cut off completely from the little world of the village, the lonely cottage seemed lonelier than ever.

The people were frightened and troubled. John Dorlcote, when he had made his brief announcement in the vestry, went into the church, and, standing up by the reading-desk, said—

"Muster Girton be very ill; you mun go home, all of ye; there will be no service this mornin'. It were at the post o' duty that the vicar ha' taken the sickness; he ha' stood by it to the last; pray for him, all on ye, for he be main sick for your sakes."

For a few moments after John had spoken, a

curious and painful silence fell upon the people. Then one or two of them whispered together, but no one would be the first to get up in his place and go away. John Dorlcote broke the spell by moving to his seat on the front bench, when he took up his books, and went back to the vestry for Dorothy. After he had gone, the people followed him, and the church was left empty.

There was no lightness in Dorothy's step as she went home through the fields beside her father, and in her sad fancy she remembered how she had sped the same path on the afternoon when she and Mathew first looked in one another's eyes. She made her father take her past the vicar's cottage, which had a mournful fascination for her now. John would not let her go even to the gate, but kept a nervous hold of her, as though he feared to trust her out of his reach.

"I pray the good Lord that it be not His will to take our vicar from us," said John, as he led his daughter away.

"Oh no, father—no! Do not think of that," said Dorothy, putting up her hand, as though she would close his mouth.

"Mr. Girton himself would say that his work here

is not yet done, and that, therefore, he must get well ; let us say so too."

"Ay! let us say that, dear heart ; an' indeed it cannot be that he should be ta'en i' this time, when the work, as he himsel' do say, is but beginnin' to bear its fruit. A good an' a true work it ha' been, though the endin' on't be yet to do."

"And he will live to bring it to the end. Say that, dear father ; for you think it, do you not?"

"Ay, sweetheart, I'll say it, for I do think it, seein' as it been't the way o' God to leave His works unfinished."

Well was it for those two troubled but trusting hearts that they could not, while they spoke, see into the sick room in Mathew's cottage, or they must have doubted sorely whether the work that he had begun was indeed to be finished by him.

It was a dark day for the village. Though Mathew's hold was not yet on the hearts of all the people, it was strong enough on many of them ; and there were none who did not feel for him in the hour of his sickness. Little stories were multiplied, and went from mouth to mouth, all pointing to the unwearied self-denial, the patience, the kindness, the love that he had shown to the sick in

the hospital and in their homes ; how he had risen in the night to go to them, and had sat with them for hours without food or rest.

There was no service in the church that evening ; the first evening it had been omitted during Mathew's ministry. Churchwarden Dorlcote doubtless should have provided a substitute for the vicar, but the duties of his position in this untoward crisis came upon him with something of a shock ; and for once he received no prompting from Dorothy, to whom it would never have occurred that anybody but Mathew could occupy Mathew's pulpit. So it was that for once, and once only, the church door was closed at the hour of evensong, and the silent bell-tower and darkened windows spoke with a simple pathos of their own.

Late in the night John Dorlcote took his lantern and went through the snow-laden fields to knock at Mathew's door. The nurse who received him had no comfort to give. The doctor was within, and would stay till morning—the least hopeful thing she could have said. A hush, almost as of death, hung over and around the cottage, and the noiseless action of the nurse as she undid the door to speak with the farmer, her bated tones, her

demure figure, even the sober colour of her dress, impressed the farmer's simple mind with a deeper sense of danger and of dread. And it seemed to him, as he went sadly home, grinding the snow beneath his heavy foot, that nature, too, was pitiless that evening. The moon's ray fell cold on him, and on the white and frost-bound fields, and an icy chill was at the heart of all things.

For the watchers at the bedside it was a troubled and a weary night, and they knew that even at the best there must be many such nights to follow. The delirium began early and lasted long, and many and curious were the phases that it took. In his wildest moments the sick man seemed to be conscious that he was held by some dire sickness to his bed, and the idea seized him that while he lay there his presence was most needed amongst the people. Often he sprang up in his bed, and cried aloud, when held down by main force, that the fiend had snared him, and would not let him forth to his work. The force of ten strong men nerved his shrunken body at these times, and they bound him with the sheets of his bed. Then his madness would change, and, his fevered mind recurring to the interview between himself and the

men, he would reason pathetically with the nurse,—who was now “Mr. Maddick,” now “Mrs. Pegler,” now “my young friend Joe,” and now “Mr. Coiting,”—and throw out a dozen well-considered arguments why the people should be on his side, and attend church, and support him in his works in the village. Again the fancy would seize him that he was in the midst of his class in the Sunday School; and passing his hand gently over the nurse’s head, and smiling on her, he would call her by one of the children’s names, and with simplicity and clearness would repeat to her some Bible story, and point its moral. Again, he would think himself in church, in the early days of his ministry, and preaching his sermon; and with a pathos that brought tears to the eyes of the watcher by his bed, would describe his position, and plead for the help of the people.

This continued intermittently for many days and nights, and in the brief moments when the madness left him, he would lie motionless and wasted, with hardly breath enough in his body to stain for an instant the glass they held to his lips.

On the second Sunday the prayers of the people were asked for him in church, and there was a rust-

ling response from every side when the words were spoken in the Litany, *especially him for whom our prayers are desired*, and an "Eemen, Oo Lord," from one or two benches.

The desire of the villagers, and of the salt-workers in particular, to show their sympathy with the patient, took many characteristic forms. A stealthy knock, heard on the door of the cottage at any hour of the day or night, told that a messenger from the salt-workers' quarter had come for the latest tidings ; and even when they had prevailed on the doctor to post a bulletin on the wall at stated intervals, the men would seldom go away after reading it until they had had the written words confirmed by the nurse.

Queer enough were some of the offerings that were brought to the door.

One carried a lump of amber-tinted salt, of about twenty pounds weight, which he thought would be a suitable ornament for the sick man's room.

Two or three stripped their walls of rude-coloured pictures of angels with ten-foot trumpets, which Mathew, in his kindly way, had noticed when he sat in their houses.

One deposited a bag of flour at the door, another brought a piece of bacon, and a third presented a stone jar containing about two gallons of a certain home-made wine, which everybody in the village praised, and nobody had ever been known to drink.

A notice of unusual brevity, to the effect that, "The dangerous symptoms have increased," posted on the wall early one morning, told those who read it that a crisis was approaching.

That day, as usual, the men were at work in the pit, and when the dinner-hour struck from the bell at the pit's mouth, and they were seated with cans and satchels before them, the flickering candles, with their clay holders, stuck in the wall above, the young man Freddy asked—

"Hev eny on ye seed the peeper nootice tew-dee?"

"Oi ha' seed un," answered Joe Pegler.

"An' wut did she speak this mornin', Joe Pegler?" asked Sandy.

"She said," replied Joe, "that deenjeraus simtums wur more deenjeraus."

There was a pause, and the men fell to in silence on their bread and bacon.

"Meets," said Joe Pegler, presently, "it be sartin suer vicur is moost wunnerful bad wi' smorlpocks."

"Yewer roight, Joe Pegler," said Sandy, "an' a pitiful thing it be."

"Meets," pursued Joe, "it be loikewise sartin suer that it be moostly along o' us as vicur is soo deenjurus bad wi' smorlpocks."

"Trew agin, Joe Pegler," answered the young man Freddy; "it wur threw tendin' o' sault-wurkurs he took her."

"Wheerfur, meets," continued Joe, in a blushing, awkward way, "it seem tew me as we should act the squeer an' honest thing if we sorter preed among oursels fur God A'moighty tew lift un' up an set un on's legs agin."

"Choorch be pleece fur pree, Joe Pegler," replied Sandy, in a doubtful tone.

"Vicur hev said," argued Joe, "that preein' is as good i' one pleece as i' another."

"Pit be a wunnerful long wee frum Hevin," said the young man Freddy. "If we was a-top i' the yard 'twould be nearer; mebbe God A'moighty wouldn't hear eny preein' i' the pit."

"It been't noo sort o' thing fur us tew tauk is the Lord be deaf," said Joe.

"Tew be suer," added Sandy; "yew didn't oughter, Freddy; it be a sort o blarsfemiousness."

A tacit acceptance being given to Joe's proposition, the question next arose, Who should be the one to pray? Not a man amongst them had ever prayed aloud in his life; and to many of them the very form and language of prayer were unfamiliar. No one would take upon him to put into devotional shape the desire of himself and his fellows; but in the end the general choice fell on Sandy Maddick, whose unwillingness to pray offered a contrast at once grotesque and pathetic to his habitual readiness to be spokesman on any secular subject. Joe made the men pull off their caps, and kneel in a circle, with Sandy—who had removed his coat as well as his cap—in the centre. Except for the little space which the candles brightened, the pit was wrapped in darkness, and the silence was intense. After two or three false starts, Sandy, with the utmost hesitation, began—

"Oo Lord, thur een't noo kwestion as we er wunnerful bad men; an' it sorter seem tew me as we er doin' the blarsfemious thing fur offer tew tauk wi' Yew. Leestwees, Oo Lord, 'twould

be real blarsfemious if 'twarn't fur seeke o' vicur up thur that we be come fur pree. But, Oo Lord, we be all on us doonroight consarned fur knoo that he be sick, an' espeshul consarned fur knoo that he be sick threw tendin' us. Oo Lord, we hev not done the squeer thing boi vicur. We hev bruk his windurs sheemful; an' thoo we was willin', an', if Yew unnerstan' me, Lord, angshus for meek good all damige, vicur he wouldn't parmit eny sich a thing, which it seem tew meek us warse 'n we was afore. But them things be sorter parst an' berrid, an' real glad we be fur that; an' wut we er here fur ask is that the Lord A'moighty—Him as vicur says do alwees listen tew fokes wut sorreys an' suffers, an' fokes wut comes tew Him i' trewness o' spirrit—will look doon on vicur an' fetch un up agin, hearty loike, and strong as afore. Oi can tell Yew, Lord, an' Joe Pegler here can tell Yew, that he wur oncommon good tew Joe when Joe wur broosed wi' rock; and oncommon good he wur tew all wut wur took wi' smorl-pocks. Oo Lord, we be rough chaps, an' few good uns amung us; but think Yew o' wut is asked an' not o' them wut asks it. Oo Lord, give back tew us oor vicur agin."

There came a night when those who kept watch over him believed that Mathew would not live to see the day. The angel of death was very close to him that night; the beating of his wings was heard against the door; but it pleased the Father that he should not enter, and with the night he vanished, and Mathew returned from the valley of the shadow, and looked on life again.

But the period then entered on was a slow and painful one. The fount of life had been almost exhausted, and it was long ere the springs that fed it could regain their freedom and fulness. As yet, Mathew was allowed no contact or communication with the little world around him; nor did he even know of the sympathies, the anxieties, and the hopes which his sickness had bred in the hearts of the people. But the patience in which he had schooled himself until it had become less a duty than a habit, less a habit than an instinct, was a helpful resource in his weakness; and when the long spell of mental torpor was broken, and the power of thought grew in him again, he found relief and comfort in memories of the immediate past, and in hopes of the time to come. Left alone for a few

moments one day, his eyes strained at the half-darkened window, and on a sudden his weakened limbs were seized with a tremor at what he believed to be a vision of a tender, wistful face with grey and tearful eyes, whose sad light shone in on him through the lattice. Starting up with words of welcome and pleasure on his lips, his strength forsook him, and he fell back, and the vision—if such it were—vanished and returned no more. But the incident stirred his pulses, and quickened his interests, and he began to hunger for news from without. It was given to him, at first in small, and then in larger measures ; and when they told him how the village had been moved on his account, the telling of it was like new wine to his senses, a more quickening draught than the doctor could have given. One day he saw the doctor writing his bulletin ; and when he heard what it was, and that such a message had been given to the people, by their own wish, every day for four weeks, the first warm blood mantled in his face, and under the doctor's name, in thin and faltering letters, he wrote his own. Two days afterwards he rose from his bed, and from that he mended rapidly.

CHAPTER XIX.

“NOT THIS ONE, O GOD.”

WHEN the snow had melted, and the spirit of the air was gentle, Mathew, leaning heavily on his stick, went down to church. It was his first attendance since his illness, and he went, not to lead the service in his accustomed place, but to sit within the Communion rails and follow it as a listener. What a new sweetness was there for him in the chanted Psalms, and a new depth and freshness of meaning in the prayers, and how lovelier than ever before seemed the lovely English liturgy. The few words of extemporised prayer in which the preacher—a friend of Mathew—expressed the devout thanks of the people for the recovery of their minister, were the drops that filled to overflowing the full cup of his gratitude and joy. The church was not only filled, it was thronged, and faces familiar enough to Mathew—but not so familiar within the walls of the

church—greeted him from every side. John and Dorothy were in their own seats on the front row ; and immediately behind them sat the foreman,—still only an occasional attendant,—Sandy, the young man Freddy, and Joe Pegler. The thin face of Sandy, with its sharp blue eyes, wore an expression akin to triumph ; for Sandy was firmly persuaded that he had had a leading hand in the vicar's recovery ; and since the praying in the pit, he had enjoyed a reputation in the village something like that acquired by the king of old time, after it had been asked concerning him, "Is Saul also among the prophets ?"

Limping down the aisle after service, Mathew went the gauntlet of the whole congregation, and a real storm of handshakings and inquiries took all the strength out of him before he reached the door of the vestry.

John and Dorothy walked on either side of him on the way home.

"It would ha' been very strange and a thing quite onaccountable, vicar, if you had not got well," said John. "I never see a village pray so afore. You'd think some of 'em only learned prayin' just to pray for you. Dorothy, do I speak truth or a lie?"

"Truth, dear father, of course," she answered. "Ah!" she said, turning to Mathew, "this is a harvest indeed."

Mathew, whose heart was still too full for many words, only smiled on them, and said God knew the gratitude that was in him.

"But soon," he added, "I shall try and show my gratitude once more in my labours. Ah, how I long to be at work again! What a pleasure it will be when the doctor sets me free."

"Why, I think the work is done now," laughed Dorothy.

"Don't tell me that; I should not like to think it," said Mathew. "Nor is it so, I am sure. Like John's stubborn field, the ground at length is broken—at least, I hope a great part of it is broken—but the best of the work has yet to be done in it. The true harvest is a long way off, nor would I have it nearer, if its nearness meant an escape from the burden and heat of the day."

"No, for now you will work in the sun and not in the storm," said Dorothy.

They left him at his garden gate, and John said, "Come when you will, you can't come too soon to the farm; isn't it so, Dorothy?"

"Yes, father; but we need not tell that to Mr. Girton; he knows it."

And Mathew said that his first visit should be to them.

Dorothy, true to the double promise she had made her father and Mathew, had remitted for many weeks her little offices of love amongst the bedridden folk in the village, and kept to the fields around the house when she took her walks. A day or two from this first Sunday that Mathew looked in health upon the world, she was walking out, and came upon a small child sitting in a tired attitude against a stile, in a ploughed field about half a mile from the village. It was one of the little ones who formed her summer "nursery," and the child cried out in a feeble pleased way when Dorothy came up, and asked what it did sitting out in the cold so far from home. The plaint of the five-year-old was that she was tired, and would like to be carried a little way. Dorothy lifted the little burden in her arms, and carried it through the field, and through the next, and the next, until they came to the edge of the village. Then, mindful of her word, she was for setting the child down, and letting it go the remaining steps alone; but the

five-year-old still pleaded tiredness, and wouldn't Dorothy please carry her just the last little bit o' the way home? So she took her to the door of the house, and gave her to her mother, without going in herself.

It was Wednesday, and that evening Mathew was greatly better, and told himself that on the next day he would be able to go to the farm. But with the next day came a change of weather, and the doctor forbade him to stir until the wind blew in a softer quarter. For four days it blew in the east, and when Sunday came Mathew was still prisoned in his room. But he sent his dame to church, and questioned her when she came back if the congregation had been as large as on the Sunday before. She said yes; but that "Muster Dorlcote and his daughter weren't i' choorch."

Mathew would not let himself think that there was anything strange in this, though he knew that neither the farmer nor Dorothy had ever before missed a morning service.

Still the wind blew in the east, but on the third morning of the week it changed, and was southerly and the sky was clear, and the morning sun warm, and Mathew had leave to walk. He would go to

the farm, and was starting, when the dame came in from the village, and said that a child had sickened with the small-pox, and that the doctor said it would not live. Mathew had been forbidden to visit amongst the people, and especially amongst the sick, for some weeks to come; but the strong sense of sympathy—strong in him always, but stronger since his own sickness—almost got the better of him, and he was hesitating whether to go down to the village, when the dame called to him that Mr. Dorlcote was coming through the fields towards the cottage. Mathew's heart misgave him as he went to meet the farmer, and misgiving passed into fear when he saw that some trouble had made the old man's face haggard.

"John, what is it?" he asked, in trembling, yet knowing the answer that would be given.

"The worst, vicar, the worst; the child has taken it," gasped John in reply.

For a moment all Mathew's strength came back to him, but the moment after it left him, and he leaned against the fence for support.

"Go back, John," he said; "I will follow when God has given me power. Stay, I will go with

you now. No, no, I cannot walk ; but to-night,— I will surely come to-night.”

“ She asks for thee,” said John, with tears in his eyes and voice. “ She says thou wilt give her comfort.”

“ O God, what comfort have I to give her ? ” groaned Mathew, as he returned to the cottage. “ Comfort Thou us, our Father in heaven, and in this thing lay not Thine hand too heavily upon me.”

The strength that had deserted him came back at evening, and though the sun had fallen and the sky was bleak, he went out at once.

Her father had spoken truly ; Dorothy was stricken very low. Mathew’s hushed footfall did not rouse her when he went in, and as he stood beside the bed, and looked on her, he hardly kept down a cry of suffering, to see how sorely she was smitten. He laid a finger on her wrist, and she opened her eyes and welcomed him. Seeing the pain that was written on his face, she said gently—

“ It is not so sore with me as that. But why not I as well as the rest ? Why should others be taken, and I not even touched ? ”

Mathew did not answer, but pressing his hands over his face, groaned aloud, "Not this one, O Lord ; O God, not this one, I beseech Thee."

"No, no," she said, putting up her hand to him ; "this is not unto death. I am not so very ill, and I shall recover."

But Mathew, whom the sight of her laid so low, and already so weak, had deprived of courage and the mastery of self, only moaned for answer.

There was just a shadow of reproach in her voice, as she said to him again, "Comfort me ; I said that you would comfort me when you came. It was my office once, it is yours now ; you must not bear it thus."

"Oh, I am weak and selfish, forgive me," he pleaded ; then sat himself beside her and said, "Give me of your bright courage, and I shall be strong. Come, let us comfort one another."

But it was sweet, sick Dorothy who took the office of comforter, and Mathew who drew in strength and hope from her words. He would have taken his turn that night as watcher, but she would not suffer him ; and bidding him remember his own enfeebled state, forced him to rest in an

inner room near hers which had been prepared for him.

The next morning she was worse, towards the afternoon her mind wandered, and in the evening delirium was at its height. From day to day the sickness deepened, and when the third and dreaded crisis approached, and the father and Mathew asked what hope there was, the doctor would not answer. The despair of John bowed him almost unto death, and for Mathew all these days were sorrows, and his heart took no rest in the night.

But the crisis came, and passed, and Dorothy lived on. The weakness of her body was extreme, and so still she lay that oftentimes they feared whether the soul was yet in her. But the doctor said that there was hope, and the father and Mathew caught at his words, and told each other and themselves that there was hope. A portion of her strength came back at last, and she revived, and could talk with them again.

"See," she said to Mathew, "how I am strengthening!"

"My soul prays it, indeed, dear Dorothy, with all its might," he answered; and then the love that was pent in him broke out, and taking her

two hands in his, and bending down till his face almost touched hers, he said, "Oh, live, beloved, live for me, and love me as I love you." The purity of his passion shone in his face, and a passion as pure kindled in hers, as she answered—

"Speak to me so again ; tell me that once more, and I cannot die."

"O God," cried Mathew, with uplifted face, "spare this one to me, that she may live and bless my life and work, and so we both may live to Thee !"

And the prayer, it seemed, was heard in Heaven's high place, and answered ; for day by day she gathered strength, and day by day they watched the slow incoming of the life-tide that had ebbed so far.

But one night, without seeming cause, she weakened again, and began to sink rapidly. It was Mathew's watch, while the nurse and her father slept within call, and as he noted her slackening pulse, and the waning of her breath, he asked anxiously, "What is this, dear one ?"

"I do not know, Mathew," she whispered ; "but I am very weak, and my heart sinks in me."

But she would have no one roused, saying that it was but a moment's weakness, and that by-and-by she should be strong again. Mathew watched her in trembling, but her pulse quickened, and she revived. Very early in the morning she sank again, and Mathew, looking closely on her, knew that she was dying.

Her eyes were closed, but presently she opened them, and softly said to him, "Come near to me, Mathew, loved one. Come very close. I am going from you; but call no one, for it will not be yet. Let us talk together for a little while."

The grey dawn came, and found them, hand shut in hand, still whispering their earnest words together.

"It is not true, then, beloved," said Mathew; "I had hoped and thought your name prophetic, but it is not so."

"Why did you think my name prophetic, and why is it not so?" she asked.

"Do you not know the meaning of your name? It is the sweetest name that ever woman bore, for it means 'gift of God.' Can you not see now why I thought it prophetic? And God is proving me wrong, by taking you from me."

"Have I, then, been no gift to you at all?" and her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Yes, yes; God knows it, and I know it. The dearest gift He could have sent me. But, ah! for how small a time, and now He comes between us, and parts us."

"His will be done," she murmured, and Mathew bowed his head; but the "Amen" that followed wrung his soul.

She slept an hour, and at sunrise she woke, and he was beside her, and they two were alone with the Spirit of God. "Kiss me, Mathew," she said. He bent to her; their lips touched; and that kiss of life and love and death was the first and the last they knew.

When her father saw her in the morning, the shadow of the grave was creeping over her, and the white seal of death was on her forehead. A great calm fell on her, and all through the day she talked with them, clearly, and without effort. In the evening she would have Mathew read to her, and he opened the Book and read in Revelation the story of "that great City," which has the walls of jasper and the gates of pearl; the City where there is no more curse, but the throne of God and

of the Lamb are in it, where His servants serve Him; the holy City, whither they knew her soul was speeding. After that, she asked for the Sacrament, and her father knelt to receive it with her.

“ ‘And when her soul shall depart from the body, it may be without spot presented unto Thee,’ ” said Mathew, repeating the service from memory; and she framed an answer for herself: *“ ‘Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’ ”*

Then her eyelids fell, and she lay motionless. An hour before midnight her face was lit by a light they had not seen before, and Mathew knew that the end was very near. Suddenly she raised herself, and sat up, seeming unconscious of their presence, as she said aloud, *“ ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ ”* She fell back, and closed her eyes, and said no more; and at midnight she died.

Very still the room was, and the wind's soft requiem rose and fell without. So gently went the spirit from the body, that the watchers scarcely knew the moment when the silver cord was loosed that sent it forth, from the night of earth into the day of Heaven. Mathew first saw that it was

well with her, and touching the father, whose head was bowed upon the bed, he told him, saying, “‘He giveth His beloved sleep.’”

Oh weary time that followed ; time of darkness as darkness itself, where the light is as darkness. Oh ! spirit, for ever freed from prison-house of earth, stay but a little in that swift flight thou wingest heavenward, and make thy pity felt where those two sad ones, a father and a lover, watch their dead alone !

Slowly the day grew in the east, and his first chill beam fell on the quiet figure of Dorothy.

CHAPTER XXI.

BENEATH AN OAK.

IN the "shady sadness" of a corner in Lintorn churchyard, a cluster of graves, separate from the rest, marks the harvest that death, one winter season, reaped in the little village. Removed from these is one grave, smaller than most of its fellows, a tiny mound, over which an oak-tree spreads its ample kindly shade. To this grave two men come very often. One of them is the widowed and childless father, John Dorlcote; the other is Mathew Girton. There is no spot on earth sweeter or more sacred to them than this, whose turf the oak-tree's shade keeps ever green. All that was earthly in their hopes is buried underneath that narrow mound, where, too, lie memories that ache the heart and soothe it. There had been nothing more than common in their sorrow, for are there not every day a hundred and a thousand men out of whose life it pleases God to take the light, and

put darkness in its place? But the pang is not the easier to bear for knowledge that others have borne it before us, are bearing it with us, and will bear it after us; and they only bear it rightly in whom is the spirit of a deep and dauntless faith, that what the Father orders is ordered well. Faithful in this wise did John Dorlcote and Mathew Girton carry the great sorrow of their lives. The old man leaned in spirit on the younger, who led him to that mercy-seat whence healing waters flow for all the sorrows of the world. Washed in that spiritual Lethe, the bitterness of sorrow passes, and that which remains is chastening. With Mathew it was again as it had been before; the duty and the labour that had been his first, became his latest and his only love; and the full fruit of his vineyard was not denied him at the last.

* * * * *

Summer by summer over the grave of Dorothy there buds and blossoms a single wild white rose, meek and fragrant emblem of the deathless flowers that blow in the gardens of Paradise.



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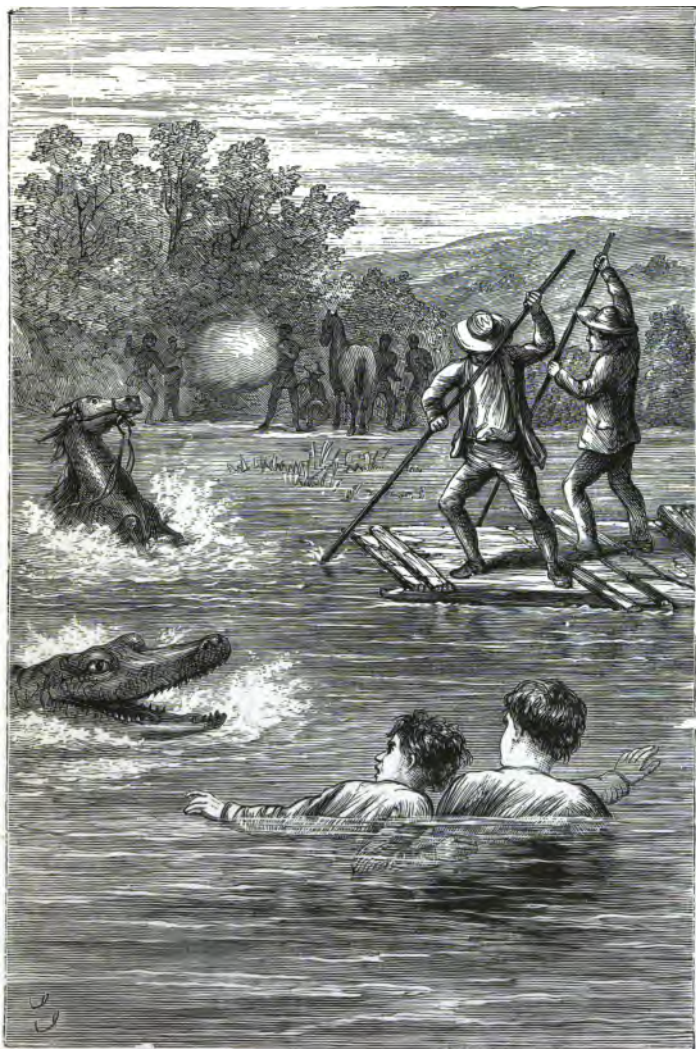
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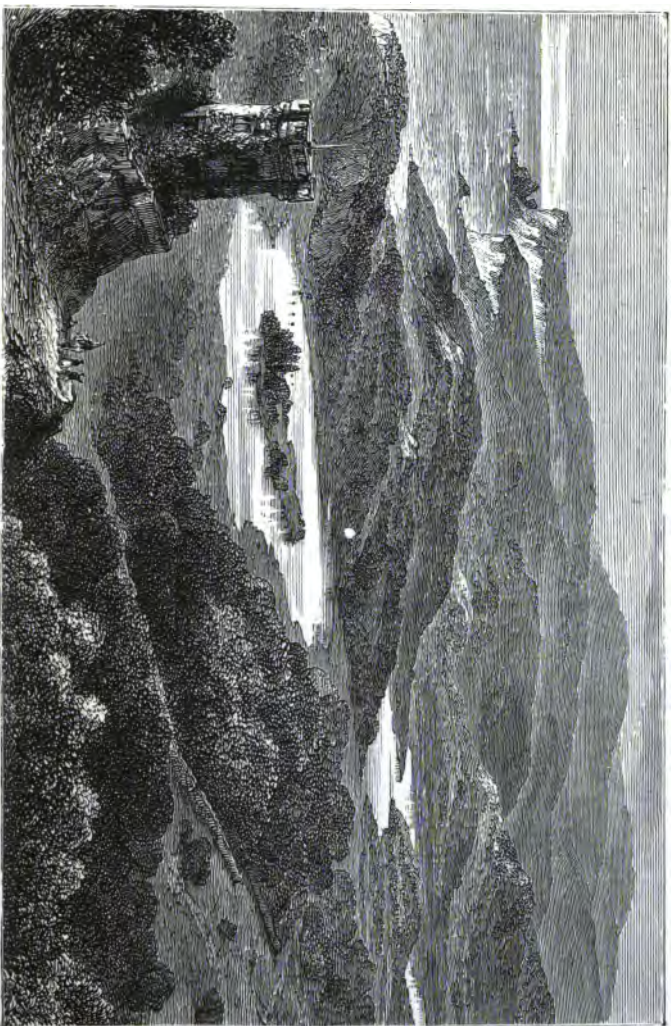
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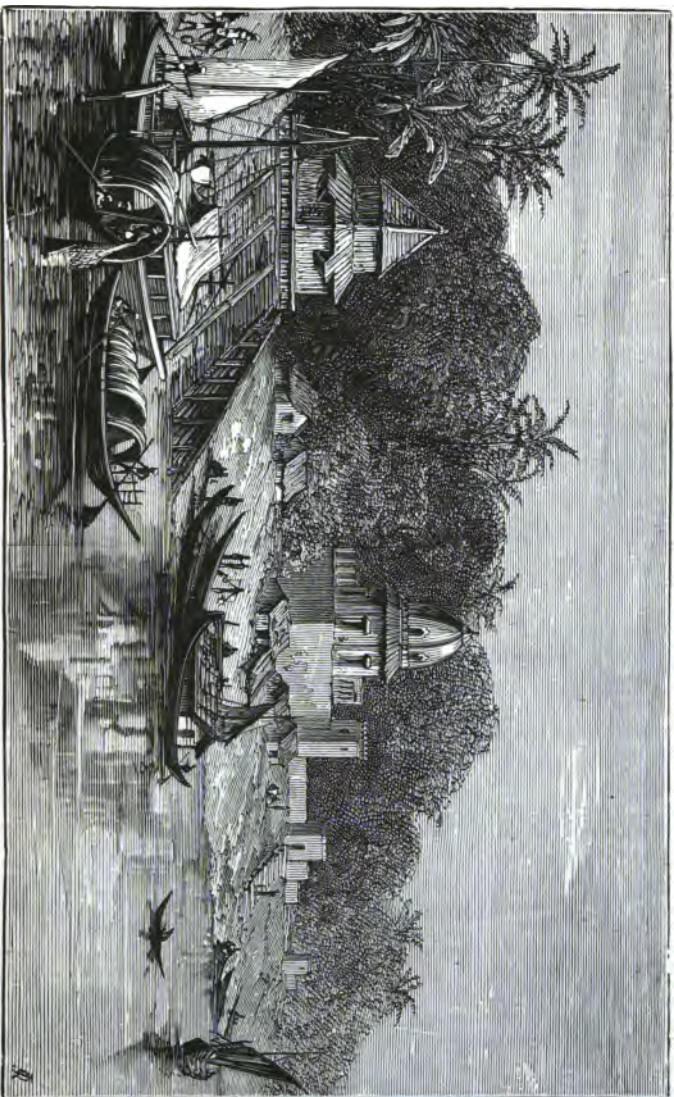
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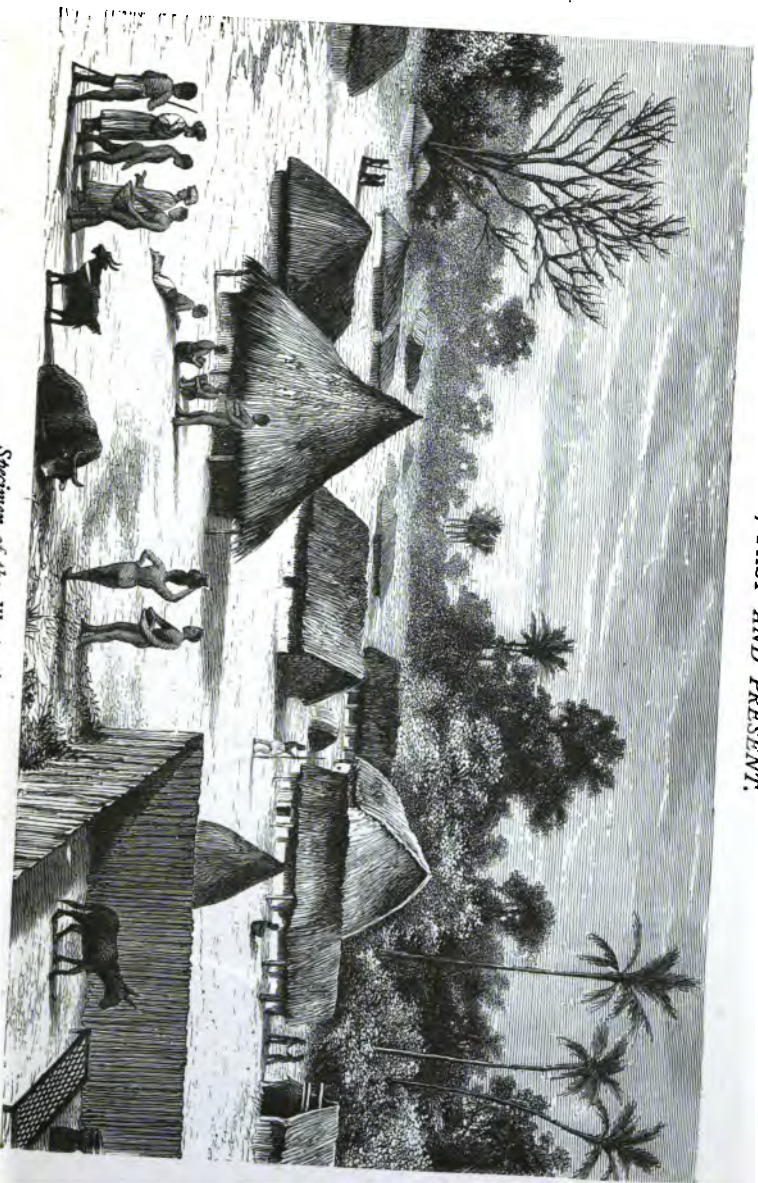
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